

San Diego Superior Court Users Survey



SANDAG Criminal Justice Research Division

May 2001

SAN DIEGO SUPERIOR COURT USERS SURVEY

San Diego



**ASSOCIATION OF
GOVERNMENTS**

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May 2001

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ABSTRACT: This project was funded by a grant from the State Justice Institute (SJI) to the San Diego Superior Court for the purpose of interviewing court users to develop programs and services responsive to community needs. The Criminal Justice Research Division of SANDAG assisted the Court in the research design and developing and administering the survey. SANDAG also analyzed the results. Interviews were conducted with over 3,000 court users at ten court facilities from June to September 2000. Results from the survey show that an overwhelming majority of court users are satisfied with the services, staff, and facilities of the San Diego Superior Court. The high level of satisfaction is consistent across diverse racial and ethnic groups, age, gender, educational levels, and language, including those who need the assistance of a court interpreter. Satisfaction is consistent among case types (civil, criminal, probate, family law, and juvenile), stakeholder groups (defendant, petitioner, plaintiff, witness, family), those with or without legal representation, and among those who visited the court for the first time or many times.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The San Diego Superior Court (hereafter, the Court) received a grant from the State Justice Institute to interview over 3,000 court users. The overall objective was to develop and administer a survey to determine court users' accessibility to facilities and services. The Court contracted with the Criminal Justice Research Division at the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) to collaborate in the survey design, train interviewers, analyze the results of the survey, and prepare a report.

The Court was successful in obtaining interviews with court users at ten different facilities in the San Diego Region and was able to learn their opinions about the capacity of the Court to facilitate access and provide appropriate services.

Issues Addressed in Interviews

Survey questions identified the reason for coming to the court including type of matter and stakeholder category; how easy or difficult it was to find the facility, courtroom or office; the respondent's opinion of court personnel; and, the adequacy of services received.

Overview of Findings

The findings indicate that court users of the San Diego Superior Court were very satisfied with the court's services, pleased with the court personnel, and able to find their way around. Respondents also offered meaningful suggestions for improvements. The responses of survey participants were examined by individual demographics, case characteristics, and by facility visited. Since there was a high degree of consensus across courts for most questions, limited sub-analyses were conducted.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Ten facilities located throughout the four regional divisions within the San Diego Superior Court system were included in this project. A pretest of the survey instrument was conducted at three court locations by SANDAG staff members. Results from the pretest indicated that the survey would provide adequate information to meet the research objectives. Pretest results also showed that a few minor adjustments were necessary with

regard to the order of the questions and format of the survey. After many months of planning and preparation, interviews with court users began in July of 2000 and continued through September, 2000.

Over 3,000 court users agreed to be interviewed. To obtain a diverse sample of court users, interviews were conducted at various times during the day and on each day of the workweek. Interviewers were retired court employees, except in the North County region where current employees were utilized to conduct the interviews. Most respondents were interviewed in English, but interviews were also conducted with persons who requested the services of a court interpreter. In most cases, the interpreters were independent contractors; however, a few interpreters were permanent court employees.

Interviewers were positioned just outside the exit of each facility and were required to ask each person as they left the building if they would participate in the survey. At facilities with more than one exit, interviewers rotated their position throughout the day. Interviewers' ethnicity, age, and gender were diverse in an added effort to encourage participation from court users.

FINDINGS

The results of this project provide sufficient evidence to support the conclusion that the San Diego Superior Court meets the needs of a diverse population, across racial and ethnic groups, age groups, genders, educational levels, and language, including those who need the assistance of a court interpreter. Satisfaction with the Court's services, staff, and facilities are also consistent when comparing survey participants by attorney representation, case types, stakeholder groups, number of court visits, and facility visited.

Survey Respondent Characteristics

The Court was successful in obtaining a cross section of court users reflecting a variety of demographic characteristics.

- The ethnicity of respondents was diverse: Four out of ten were Hispanic; about the same proportion were White; and about one in ten African American. The remainder of the respondents were of various other ethnicities.
- About sixty percent of respondents graduated from high school: About one in five indicated that this was their highest level of education; about one in five said they had also completed college; and about one in three had completed *some* college courses.
- The majority of survey participants were between the ages of 18 and 54; about one in ten were age 55 or older; and slightly more than half were men.

- A large proportion of respondents indicated that they live in the City of San Diego based on the zip code that respondents provided as their place of residence.

The Court was successful in obtaining a cross section of court users among case type characteristics.

- Nearly half of the survey participants indicated that they were at court for a criminal/traffic matter; one-fifth each for a civil matter or family law matter; and the balance were proportioned among juvenile, probate, and other matters.
- Half of the survey participants identified themselves as a Defendant/Respondent in a court case; about one-fifth each said they were either a Plaintiff/Petitioner or a friend/family member of someone at court; the rest of the participants were there as a witness or victim, working for an attorney service, or at court for some other reason.
- The respondents interviewed most often were Defendants at court for a criminal matter (which include traffic matters).
- A high proportion of visitors to the courts are repeat visitors. About two-thirds of respondents had been to the facility previously, and more than half of those had visited the court during the previous month.
- Compared to respondents at other facilities, survey participants at the Hall of Justice (the main courthouse in downtown San Diego) were more likely to have visited the facility previously.

Satisfaction with Staff and Services

Court users are overwhelmingly satisfied with the treatment they receive by court staff and the services they receive while at court.

- Nearly nine out of ten respondents agree that court personnel are friendly and courteous.
- About eight out of ten agree that court personnel...
 - are available to answer their questions
 - take time to explain things
 - know the answer to their questions, and
 - provide prompt service at the clerks' counters.

Most court users agree that the Court has adequate staff and provides enough information about court procedures and services.

- About three-quarters of those interviewed agree that the court provides adequate information about its procedures and services.
- Seven out of ten respondents agree that the court has adequate staff to do its job.

There is a relationship between some respondent characteristics and the level of satisfaction with court personnel and services received.

- The results show that there is an inverse relationship between level of satisfaction and the number of visits to the court facility; that is, as the number of visits *increases*, the level of satisfaction *decreases*.
- A greater proportion of those interviewed by an interpreter, compared to those interviewed in English, are pleased with court staff and services received. This may be partially due to those respondents' appreciation of the Court's provision of an interpreter.
- The findings from the survey reveal that court users who telephone the court to get information prior to their arrival *are less likely* to be satisfied with staff and services.
- Compared to survey respondents at other facilities, a smaller proportion of Family Court participants were satisfied with court personnel and services received.

Accessibility

One of the Court's major goals for this project was to determine if all court users are able to access the courts without restrictions.

Court users are not barred from accessing the courts due to court costs, feelings of safety, physical limitations, respondents' language, or other issues.

- Almost all court users feel safe while in the building (95% of respondents).
- Nine out of ten survey participants indicated there was *not* any business at the court that they could not afford. Furthermore, of the one in ten survey participants who stated that there was business at the court which they could not afford, most referred to the costs associated with legal representation or fines, not *court* costs.

- Fourteen (14) respondents stated they experienced a problem using the facility due to a physical disability.
- Of those respondents who had been in a courtroom on the day of the interview, more than eight out of ten said the proceedings were easy to follow and understand. There were *no differences* between English speaking and non-English speaking court users in their ability to follow and understand courtroom proceedings. There were also no differences when results were compared by demographic or case type characteristics, or by facility visited.

Information Accessibility

The Court provides several resources to assist visitors in locating information. The public can contact the Court by telephone, through written correspondence, and by accessing the Court's Internet Web site. Directories, facility maps, or posted signs, as well as staffed information booths, are also available at most facilities to assist visitors in locating the offices or courtrooms they need. The Court's Web site provides detailed driving directions, court forms, answers to frequently asked questions, phone numbers, as well as links to other resources.

Court users who attempt to locate information prior to and after their arrival at court are able to do so with success, and most find the information helpful.

- One in five survey respondents telephoned the court prior to his/her arrival at the facility, and of those, two-thirds said it was helpful.
- A small percentage (4%) of court users wrote to the court; however, of those who did, about half said it was helpful.
- Most of those who attempted to get information from the Court's Web site said it was helpful, although less than five percent of court users used this resource.
- More than half of those surveyed asked someone at the facility for assistance to locate the office or courtroom they needed.
- About one-quarter of the respondents used a directory, map, or sign for assistance.
- Nine out of ten respondents who either asked someone for assistance or used a directory, map, or sign said it was helpful.

There are some differences among court users' demographics and case type characteristics as to whether or not they will seek assistance or information

- More women than men telephoned the court to get information prior to his/her arrival.

- Survey respondents who were represented by an attorney were *more* likely to ask someone for assistance, but *less* likely to use a directory, map or sign.
- As expected, visitors who were at the court for the first time, compared to those who had previously visited the court, were more likely to call the court to get information prior to going to the facility. Also, nearly twice as many first-time visitors asked someone at the court for assistance, compared to those who had been to the court six times or more.
- Respondents with a college education were more likely than other respondents to call the court *prior* to their arrival. However, the reverse was true *after* arriving at the facility: a greater proportion of respondents with lower educational levels asked someone for assistance compared to those with more education.
- More English speakers called the court to get information than non-English speakers.
- Court users interviewed by an interpreter were more likely than English speakers to ask someone for assistance; however, *no differences* in these two groups were found with respect to the proportion who used a directory, map, or sign.
- Respondents at Juvenile Court were more likely to ask someone for assistance. This may be partially explained by the placement of the information booth at Juvenile Court, which is directly in the path of visitors as they enter the facility.

Locating the Facilities and Offices

Court users are able to locate the correct facilities, offices, and courtrooms with ease.

- Nine out of ten court users are able to locate the facility they require easily, and the same proportion are able to locate the correct office or courtroom.
- Compared to respondents at other court locations, a greater proportion of court users at the San Marcos and Kearny Mesa facilities experienced difficulty in locating the buildings, but not the offices or courtrooms.
- As expected, fewer first-time visitors thought it was easy to find the correct facility compared to those who had been to the court previously.

POSSIBLE REASONS FOR HIGH PUBLIC SATISFACTION

It is unusual for a customer survey of any kind to result in such overwhelmingly positive findings. Given the total number of interviews conducted and the number of facilities involved, the authors are confident that the results are reliable and methodologically sound. To assist other court jurisdictions to know why court customers responded so

favorably in San Diego, SANDAG staff met with Court staff to pursue possible reasons for the high level of court user satisfaction, as evidenced by the survey results. The following information was provided by Court personnel.

- In December of 1998, the four Municipal Courts and the San Diego Superior Court unified into one single Superior Court. Court unification provided the opportunity to standardize the commitment to public service on a countywide basis.
- Commitment to the public is a key issue in the San Diego Superior Court planning process. Overall goals are to provide equal access to the Court for all people, enhance public service in the Court, and to promote the quality of justice by focusing on service and improving the public's understanding of court operations.
- A number of operational changes have been made that directly benefit the public. These include:
 - Civil and criminal cases that were previously handled independently are now combined within the Central Division of the Court.
 - The calendaring of cases has been improved to increase public convenience.
 - Arraignments are now allowed at the counter in some instances (such as traffic) instead of requiring a court appearance.

The Court's stated plan is to carefully review the results of the survey so that some of the suggestions made for improving service can be evaluated and implemented where feasible.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Due to the extremely high level of satisfaction among court users, recommendations for improvement of court services and access to the facilities were few. SANDAG makes the following suggestions based on survey data, including comments from participants. The recommendations are offered as a means to continue the high level of satisfaction among court users.

- Directories, maps, and other signs located inside or outside court facilities should be located in places easily noticed by court visitors. Stand-alone signs directing the visitors' attention to the directories would provide additional visual assistance.
- To increase public awareness and reduce feelings of frustration, posted signs should be utilized to inform court users that staff (including court clerks) are statutorily *precluded* from providing legal advice, which includes assisting court users in completing many of the forms or advising them on which form to file. Training court personnel to politely communicate this to court users would also be helpful.
- Most court users would benefit from a map of each court facility. The maps could be posted at the entrance or provided as a hand-out upon entry. This would be especially

helpful at facilities with multiple floors, such as the Hall of Justice, the Central Courthouse, the Madge Bradley Facility, and the regional centers located in Vista, East, and South County.

- Most court users indicated that they would benefit from the court docket being posted at the entrance to each facility, rather than on the outside of courtroom doors.
- Many court users would like to have a pamphlet available explaining the procedures and processes they might encounter while at court. It is recommended that upon filing a civil court action (including family law matters), Petitioners and Plaintiffs be provided such a pamphlet. A pamphlet for court users involved in criminal/traffic cases would be beneficial as well.
- It would be easier for court users to find their destination if the numbers corresponded to their location within the facility. For example, a courtroom or office that is numbered 400 would be on the fourth floor of a facility.
- Due to the high proportion of Hispanic residents in San Diego County who utilize the courts, as well as the projected Hispanic population estimates, all communication from the Court should be in both English and Spanish. This recommendation includes written notices to appear in court, recorded telephonic messages, and a link on the Web site to information in Spanish.
- The Court should explore ways to inform the public of the Court's Web site and the types of information available on the site.
- Given the large number of survey respondents who expressed a willingness to be part of a focus group to discuss the Court's operations, the Court staff should develop a plan to obtain feedback from the individuals who provided their names and address information.

CHAPTER 1

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

This project was funded by a grant from the State Justice Institute (SJI) to the San Diego Superior Court for the purpose of interviewing court users. The project was initiated by the Court's Community-Focused Planning Committee and the objective was to provide information to the Court's strategic and operational planning efforts that could be used to develop programs and services responsive to community needs. The Court contracted with the Criminal Justice Research Division at the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) to develop the survey, train the interviewers, monitor the interview process, prepare data for computer management, analyze the results, and prepare a report.

COURT FACILITIES

The San Diego Superior Court is composed of four regional divisions: Central, North County, East County, and South County. Each division has one or more court facilities with jurisdiction over specific matters occurring in that particular region.

The six facilities under the jurisdiction of the Central Court Division are located within the City of San Diego and specialize in the following matters:

- Juvenile Court (adjudication of dependency, delinquency, and criminal cases involving minors, except traffic)
- Kearny Mesa Facility (juvenile and adult traffic matters, and small claims cases)
- Madge Bradley Facility (domestic violence, temporary restraining orders, and probate)
- Family Court (dissolution of marriage, child support, and custody)
- Hall of Justice (civil and criminal)
- Central Court (criminal and traffic infractions).

There are two facilities in the North County Division:

- North County Regional Center, located in Vista, is a multi-jurisdictional facility handling criminal, civil, probate, small claims, family law, some traffic matters (driving under the influence), and some juvenile matters.
- San Marcos Facility handles small claims and most traffic matters.

There are two facilities in the East County Division:

- The East County Regional Center, located in the City of El Cajon, is a multi-jurisdictional facility handling civil, criminal, family law, juvenile dependency, traffic, and infraction cases.
- The Ramona Branch handles civil, small claims, traffic, and infraction cases.

The South County Division has one multi-jurisdictional facility:

- The South County Regional Center, located in the City of Chula Vista, handles civil, criminal, family law, and traffic matters.

Interviews were conducted at all court facilities, with the exception of the Ramona Branch facility. The Ramona Branch is unlike the other courts in that (1) it handles a limited number of cases; and (2) a Superior Court judge is only available to hear cases on Fridays and a pro-tem commissioner is available on Mondays.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The overall objectives of the project were to develop and administer a survey that focused on the court users' access to court facilities and the efficiency of the Court and its staff.

The ten San Diego Superior Court facilities described above participated in the project. The original research design proposed a total of 3,325 interviews to be conducted: 2,500 in English and 825 by court interpreters in languages other than English.

To proportion the surveys among the ten facilities, the Special Projects Unit staff calculated the average daily volume (ADV) of visitors based upon the number of persons entering the court facilities via the weapons screening stations. The ADV does not include persons who enter the facilities through the court employee or law enforcement personnel entrances as these court users were not included in the survey. It was determined that a minimum of 200 interviews per facility would both provide a sufficient number of surveys for statistical analysis and meet the ADV proportion. Due to the high number of visitors at the Central Court and the Hall of Justice, it was proposed that additional interviews be conducted at these locations to more closely match the relative proportion of the ADV (Hall of Justice, 440; Central Court, 430).

The Court was also interested in the opinions of court users who do not speak English. The project design included 825 additional interviews to be conducted in languages other than English. The ADV of court users requesting an interpreter provided the basis for proportioning the other-than-English (OTE) interviews. The Special Projects Unit staff analyzed requests for interpreters and determined that Spanish was the most requested language by non-English speaking court users. Therefore, the Court elected to conduct the majority (625 of 825) of OTE interviews in Spanish, by court interpreters. Interviews were divided proportionately (using ADV) among the main facilities in each of the four regions: San Diego Central Courthouse (265; 42%); East County (137; 22%); North County (Vista and

San Marcos) (124, 20%); and South County (99, 16%). The balance of additional surveys (200) was reserved for interviews in languages other than Spanish. These interviews were conducted by court interpreters in the other languages most often requested by non-English speaking court users (Vietnamese, Tagalog, Laotian, and Cambodian). The ADV for each facility is presented in Appendix A, Table A-1.

SURVEY DESIGN

The San Diego Superior Court and the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) collaborated on the design of the survey instrument. The survey questions were largely derived from the Trial Court Performance Standards developed by the National Center for State Courts. The survey addressed the needs of court users by asking respondents a variety of questions related to:

- finding the building, offices, and courtrooms
- using the facilities
- obtaining information (prior to the court visit and while at the court)
- the helpfulness of court personnel
- the usefulness of written communications from the court
- and the perception of the clarity of the court procedures and proceedings.

The survey also provided several opportunities for respondents to offer suggestions for improvement, or to state why something was not useful or helpful. The survey was designed to be conducted in person by trained interviewers.

Pretest

After the Superior Court Special Projects Unit and SANDAG agreed upon the survey questions, staff members from SANDAG conducted a pretest of approximately 100 interviews at three different court facilities.

Results from the pretest showed that a few minor modifications to the formatting of the survey were necessary to reduce missed skip-patterned questions and increase clarity and respondent understanding. The responses from pretest surveys were entered into a computer program and analyzed using Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS) software and programs. The purpose for this preliminary analysis was to examine survey effectiveness to obtain sufficient data from which to compare responses from the proposed questions. All modifications to the survey instrument were approved by the San Diego Superior Court Special Projects Unit staff.

Adjustments to the Proposed Number of Surveys

In the original research design, the number of English interviews planned for the Hall of Justice and Central Court was 430 and 440, respectively. However, during the time period

that interviewers were surveying court users (June, July, August, and September 2000), interviewers were unable to obtain the number of eligible respondents originally planned, but were able to obtain well over the minimum of 200 per facility which provided statistical validity (351 at the Hall of Justice; 347 at Central Court).

Similar difficulties were experienced in obtaining the proposed number of surveys conducted in languages other than Spanish or English (Vietnamese, Tagalog, Laotian, or Cambodian). The Court does not have control over the number of visitors requesting an interpreter on any given day, and therefore could not ensure that the desired number of surveys was obtained in these languages. Therefore, the research design was modified to include respondents requesting an interpreter in any language. Overall, court interpreters were able to conduct the following interviews: 17 in Vietnamese; 13 in Laotian/Cambodian; six in Tagalog; and 12 in various other languages. Most of these interviews were conducted at either the Central Court or the South Bay Regional Facility and are included in the analyses, together with the Spanish interviews, as “other-than-English.” Two of the interviews conducted in Vietnamese and four of the interviews in ‘other’ languages were ultimately excluded from the analysis because they were the only “other-than-English” interviews conducted at one of the facilities and not a sufficient number for statistical analysis. However, the responses were tabulated and provided to the Court for informational purposes.

INTERVIEWER TRAINING AND SUPERVISION

Interviewers hired by the San Diego Superior Court for this project were court retirees, or current employees of the Court and assigned to this project. All participated in a half-day training session. To encourage consistent interview techniques, staff were trained in one single session. During the training session, standardized methods for interviewing respondents and recording their answers were presented. Each interviewer was provided a notebook containing detailed instructions, several blank ‘practice’ surveys, an overall description of the project, an interview schedule, and other administrative paperwork. Interviewers were asked to review the instructions and return the completed practice surveys to SANDAG researchers. Thirty-two interviewers worked on this project.

Site Coordinators

One supervisor at each court was selected as a ‘Site Coordinator’ for that facility. The Site Coordinator’s responsibilities included providing access to any restricted areas needed by interviewers, authorizing interviewers’ time sheets, and securing the ‘Site Box.’ The Site Box contained clipboards, signs, office supplies, and surveys. The Site Coordinator was also responsible for contacting SANDAG if a problem arose related to the project at their facility.

SAMPLING

Interviewers were instructed to locate themselves near the exits of each courthouse and ask every court visitor leaving the building to participate in the project. This procedure was modified at the Hall of Justice: the majority of eligible respondents at this location were at the business office, which is where interviewers positioned themselves. In an effort to obtain a cross section of court visitors, interviewers were scheduled each day of the workweek and during each hour the courts were open for business. Survey participants were given a packet of Post-it® notes with the Court's seal and Web Site address as a token of appreciation for their participation.

Not all court visitors were eligible to participate. One of the objectives of the project was to learn the opinions of court users who are not familiar with the justice system. For purposes of this project, court users were people who were conducting business with the court. Therefore, persons currently employed by a justice-related public or private agency were excluded from the project. This precluded participation of police officers, attorneys (public and private), and personnel employed by a federal, state, city, or county courthouse, jail, prison, or a district attorney's office. Jurors were not selected to participate because the Court currently surveys them. Based on a standardized format, interviewers asked questions to determine the eligibility of the respondent as soon as the interview began. If an interview was initiated with an ineligible participant, the respondent was politely excused.

The sample of respondents, thus, was a convenience sample with specific exceptions.

Tally Sheets

Tally sheets were provided and interviewers were asked to document the number of potential respondents they contacted during their workday. The tally sheets included columns to record the number of completed interviews, the number of people that refused to participate, and the number of people that were willing but had not yet finished with their business at the court. Interviewers were instructed to fax a completed tally sheet to SANDAG researchers at the end of their shift. SANDAG staff used the data from the tally sheets to track the number of completed surveys and inform interviewers when the required number of interviews had been achieved. Survey forms were collected and reviewed for completion and accuracy.

SURVEY REVIEW

SANDAG researchers routinely collected surveys from each facility. The surveys were counted and reviewed. Open-ended responses were examined for similarities, and comments found to be related were coded accordingly for data entry. All other open-ended responses were entered into a computer Word file and provided to the Special Projects Unit staff at the completion of the project. Data from all surveys were entered into a computer file and analyzed using Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS) software and programs.

DATA ANALYSES

Some respondents elected not to answer all of the survey questions. The percentages in the tables are based upon the total number of individuals responding to each question, excluding those who chose not to answer. Therefore, total respondents vary from question to question, as noted on the tables. In addition, percentages on tables may not add to 100 due to either rounding or multiple response options. The overall percentages and raw number of responses for each question are presented in Appendix C.

Tables in the report are based on both simple analysis of the frequencies and cross-tabulations of respondent socio-demographic characteristics. Respondents are also compared by the number of visits made to the facilities, case types, and across courts. Additionally, respondents involved in litigation are compared by whether or not they were represented by an attorney. Litigants (defendants/respondents, or plaintiffs/petitioners) without the assistance of legal representation are commonly identified in the courts as 'In Pro Per' litigants. Comparisons in this report of In Pro Per respondents to those with an attorney included litigants who were at court for any *type* of case: civil, criminal, probate, family law, or juvenile matters.

The vast majority of respondents at all court facilities responded positively to many of the questions presented. Therefore, only a few cross-tabulation comparisons resulted in a difference of statistical significance. Cross-tabulation comparisons that did achieve statistical significance are presented. Other comparisons are presented to provide a basis for discussion of the results. However, not every question is presented comparing the respondent characteristics delineated above. It can be inferred that any cross-tabulations not included showed (1) no statistical significance, and (2) differences in percentages were minor.

CHAPTER 2

RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS

RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS

INTRODUCTION

A sample of respondents representing a cross section of English-speaking court users was obtained by scheduling interviewers at each facility on various days of the week, both morning and afternoon. Interviewers asked every person to participate as they exited the facility. A sample of interviews with non English-speaking court users was obtained from those who requested an interpreter and cases assigned to the court calendar that included an interpreter (interviews were conducted by an interpreter). Results from the data analyses confirm that this process achieved the goal of sampling a cross section of court users. Overall, 3,045 respondents were interviewed and included in the data analysis. This chapter presents the demographic profile of respondents, the characteristics that describe the reason they visited the court (type of matter and stakeholder category), and how many times they had visited the court prior to the interview.

RESPONDENT PROFILE

Interviewers asked respondents to provide their age, ethnicity, and level of education. If a respondent declined to provide the information, interviewers were instructed *not* to presume these characteristics. Fewer than two percent of respondents elected *not* to provide this information. Table 2.1 presents the overall demographic profile of respondents.

Age. The majority of respondents were under the age of 55. Forty-four percent (44%) were between the ages of 18 and 34, and eleven percent were age 55 and older (Table 2.1).

Gender. More than half of all respondents were men (56%), and consequently the balance (44%) of respondents were women (Table 2.1).

Ethnicity. Forty percent (40%) of all respondents stated their ethnicity as Hispanic, 39 percent said White, 12 percent said African American, seven percent indicated Asian, and two percent indicated some other ethnicity (including Native American) (Table 2.1).

Education Level. More than half of all respondents had attended college. Twenty-nine percent (29%) attended ‘some’ college, 20 percent earned at least a four year degree, and seven percent indicated that they had attended a vocational or trade school. Twenty-three percent (23%) of respondents’ highest level of education was a high school diploma, and about the same percentage (22%) had not graduated from high school (Table 2.1).

Table 2.1
Respondent Demographics
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

Age	Percent	Gender	Percent
18 to 34	44%	Male	56%
35 to 54	45%	Female	44%
55 and older	11%		
Respondents	3,018	Respondents	3,004
Ethnicity		Level of Education	
African American	12%	Less than 9th grade	11%
Asian / Pacific Islander	7%	Some high school	11%
Hispanic	40%	High school diploma / G.E.D.	23%
Native American	1%	Vocational or trade school	7%
White	39%	Some college	29%
Other	1%	Four year degree or more	20%
Respondents	2,995	Respondents	3,017

Respondent Demographics by Facility. Demographic characteristics were also compared across court facilities, and selected results are presented in the following tables.

Age by Facility. Table 2.2 presents respondent age by facility visited. At Juvenile Court, 60 percent of respondents were in the mid-range category (35 to 54), which is a reflection of parents accompanying their children to court. Although a greater percentage of Hall of Justice respondents (20%) were over 55 years of age (other facilities ranged from 5% to 15%), the differences are not statistically significant.

Table 2.2
Age by Facility
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

	East County	South County	Vista	San Marcos	Central Court	Hall of Justice	Family Court	Madge Bradley	Kearny Mesa	Juvenile Court
18 to 34	43%	57%	41%	57%	42%	34%	47%	42%	47%	32%
35 to 54	45%	37%	46%	36%	47%	46%	48%	51%	38%	60%
55 and older	11%	6%	13%	8%	11%	20%	5%	8%	15%	8%
Respondents	376	297	275	280	649	351	197	200	201	192

SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments

Ethnicity by Facility. A statistically significant difference is found in the ethnicity of respondents across courts (Table 2.3). For instance, Hispanic respondents comprised 70 percent at the South County Regional Center compared to the Hispanic representation at other courts (ranging from 53% at Central Court to 13% the Kearny Mesa Facility). There is also a significant difference in the percentage of African American respondents at each court site, ranging from 25 percent (Madge Bradley) to five percent (Vista).

Table 2.3
Ethnicity by Facility
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

	East County	South County	Vista	San Marcos	Central Court	Hall of Justice	Family Court	Madge Bradley	Kearny Mesa	Juvenile Court
African American	7%	6%	5%	8%	13%	16%	20%	25%	15%	14%
Asian	2%	8%	3%	3%	9%	8%	8%	7%	12%	8%
White	41%	14%	50%	44%	24%	55%	40%	41%	57%	45%
Hispanic	47%	70%	40%	41%	53%	16%	30%	26%	13%	30%
Other	3%	2%	1%	4%	2%	4%	2%	1%	3%	4%
Respondents	377	295	276	275	643	343	198	198	198	192

Results are significant at .05 percent.
SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments

Level of Education Attained by Facility. A significant difference was also noted among respondents when comparing educational levels across courts (Table 2.4). A greater percentage (41%) of respondents at the Central Courthouse had not completed high school compared to other facilities (ranging from 30% at East County to 4% at Kearny Mesa). Along the same lines, a greater percentage of respondents at the Hall of Justice (38%) reported having earned a four-year college degree compared to other facilities (ranging from 33% at Kearny Mesa to 12% at Central Court). At Central Court, about one-half of the respondents did not speak English and were therefore interviewed by an interpreter (interpreter interviews were also conducted at several other courts). To determine if the results indicating a statistically significant difference in educational level were tied in any way to those interviewed by an interpreter, this group of respondents was filtered out of the data and the cross-tabulation was re-examined, with no change in significance (not shown).

Table 2.4
Education Level by Facility
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

	East County	South County	Vista	San Marcos	Central Court	Hall of Justice	Family Court	Madge Bradley	Kearny Mesa	Juvenile Court
12th grade or less	30%	25%	22%	19%	41%	5%	8%	6%	4%	19%
H.S. Graduate	26%	29%	23%	26%	21%	14%	20%	26%	15%	26%
Vocational College	7%	5%	4%	6%	7%	8%	9%	9%	9%	9%
Some College	22%	26%	31%	31%	20%	35%	39%	39%	39%	33%
Four-year Degree	15%	15%	20%	18%	12%	38%	24%	20%	33%	13%
Respondents	377	300	276	280	645	349	202	196	201	191

Results are significant at .05 percent.
SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments

Respondents' Language. The majority of respondents (78%) were interviewed in English (Table 2.5). In addition, interviews were also conducted with respondents who requested the services of a court interpreter. Most of the interviews not conducted in English were completed in Spanish (21%). A few respondents, as noted, were interviewed in other languages. Respondents were interviewed in languages other than English at the following facilities: Central Court (308); East County (140); South County (100); Vista (70); and San Marcos (53) (not shown).

Table 2.5
Respondents' Language
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>
English	78%	2,374
Spanish	21%	627
Vietnamese	<1 %	15
Laotian	<1 %	13
Tagalog	<1 %	6
Arabic/ other	<1 %	10
Respondents	100%	3,045

SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments

Respondents' Residence. Respondents were asked to provide the postal code (zip code) of their residence. Fewer than two percent of respondents declined to give this information to the interviewer. Postal codes were classified according to the four main regions in San Diego County (North, South, East, and the City of San Diego), as well as "Other California" areas and "Out of State" areas. The "Out of State" category includes respondents from Mexico. Most (44%) respondents live in the City of San Diego (Table 2.6), followed by 17 percent in North County, and 12 percent each in East and South County.

Table 2.6
Respondents' Residence
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>
City of San Diego	44 %	1,328
North County	17 %	523
East County	12 %	360
South County	12 %	366
Other California	4 %	133
Out of State	10 %	285
Respondents	100%	2,995

SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments

Respondents' Residence by Facility. Respondents' place of residence was also compared by facility. The data indicate that the majority of respondents live near the court they visited. However, some variances in that finding were noted at a few of the facilities. For example, 13 percent of San Marcos respondents live out of state and 12 percent live outside the county (Table 2.7). As might be expected, South County Regional Center had the greatest percentage (16%) of out of state respondents, which includes visitors from Mexico.

Table 2.7
Respondents' Residence by Facility
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

	East County	South County	Vista	San Marcos	Central Court	Hall of Justice	Family Court	Madge Bradley	Kearny Mesa	Juvenile Court
San Diego City	26%	21%	8%	7%	69%	67%	60%	63%	65%	42%
North County	2%	2%	71%	66%	6%	8%	9%	7%	10%	10%
East County	53%	3%	0%	0%	5%	8%	10%	7%	9%	21%
South County	6%	54%	2%	3%	10%	6%	11%	11%	6%	13%
Outside SD County	4%	4%	6%	12%	4%	3%	2%	4%	3%	3%
Out of State	9%	16%	12%	13%	6%	8%	9%	8%	8%	11%
Respondents	372	301	264	276	644	348	200	198	198	194

SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments

Type of Matter

The Court was interested in knowing not only the socio-demographic differences of respondents, but also types of matters, or reasons, people had come to court. Interviewers asked respondents to choose from a list of categories to identify the reason they had come to court on the day they were interviewed. The largest portion of court users interviewed (49%) were at court because of a criminal matter (which includes traffic offenses) (Table 2.8). Respondents in the Other category include those who came to watch trials, to visit an employee of the court, to conduct research, or "just for fun."

Table 2.8
Type of Matter
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>What type of matter brought you to the court today?</i>		
	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>
Criminal/Traffic	49%	1,490
Civil	20%	607
Family Law	19%	589
Juvenile	6%	185
Probate	2%	58
Other	3%	99
Total	100%	3,028
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>		

Type of Matter by Facility. Many of the San Diego Superior Court facilities handle specific matters. For example, the Kearny Mesa Facility only handles traffic cases and small claims matters (civil cases under \$5,000). Therefore, the respondent's type of matter when compared across facilities generally reflects the matters that each court handles (Table 2.9).

Table 2.9
Type of Matter by Facility
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

	East County	South County	Vista	San Marcos	Central Court	Hall of Justice	Family Court	Madge Bradley	Kearny Mesa	Juvenile Court
Civil	14%	11%	25%	<1%	8%	89%	<1%	13%	25%	5%
Probate	0%	0%	3%	0%	1%	<1%	0%	21%	0%	1%
Family Law	20%	11%	25%	0%	16%	2%	96%	50%	0%	5%
Criminal ¹	63%	76%	41%	96%	70%	2%	0%	10%	74%	3%
Juvenile	1%	1%	3%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	87%
Other	2%	2%	3%	4%	5%	5%	3%	6%	0%	0%
Respondents	377	303	274	279	651	350	202	197	201	194
¹ Includes traffic matters										
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>										

Stakeholder Category

Stakeholder, for this project, is a description of who the survey participant is relative to the reason he or she came to court. For example, the stakeholder category of a person who filed a case is a Petitioner or Plaintiff. Half of those interviewed for this project were either a Defendant or a Respondent in a court action (Table 2.10). Twenty percent (20%) were either a Plaintiff or Petitioner, and about the same percentage (19%) were either a friend or family member of someone who was at court. Participants in the Other category include those affiliated with the media, a community organization, social services, and persons who were at court for personal reasons.

Table 2.10
Stakeholder Category
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>What brought you to the court today?</i>		
	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>
Defendant / Respondent	50%	1,510
Plaintiff / Petitioner	20%	612
Friend / Family	19%	565
Attorney Service	4%	125
Witness or Victim	3%	79
Other	4%	132
Total	100%	3,023
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>		

Stakeholder by Facility. The stakeholder category of survey participants generally reflects the type of matter heard at each court. For example, 78 percent of those interviewed at Juvenile Court were in the category of family or friend (Table 2.11).

Table 2.11
Stakeholder Category by Facility
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

	East County	South County	Vista	San Marcos	Central Court	Hall of Justice	Family Court	Madge Bradley	Kearny Mesa	Juvenile Court
Defendant / Resp.	61%	64%	41%	91%	56%	19%	22%	34%	74%	14%
Plaintiff / Pet.	19%	13%	27%	1%	8%	37%	62%	38%	17%	5%
Friend / Family	17%	17%	16%	6%	23%	8%	8%	17%	7%	78%
Witness or Victim	2%	1%	5%	<1%	6%	1%	<1%	3%	<1%	3%
Attorney Service	0%	2%	5%	0%	1%	24%	2%	3%	1%	0%
Other	2%	3%	7%	2%	6%	11%	4%	6%	0%	1%
Respondents	375	302	274	279	651	347	202	198	201	194
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>										

Type of Matter by Stakeholder. The type of matter of survey participants was also compared by stakeholder category. Seventy-six percent (76%) of participants who were with an attorney service were at court for a civil matter (Table 2.12). Most Defendants (75%) were at court for a criminal matter and nearly all of the Plaintiffs or Petitioners were at court for either a family law case (46%) or a civil matter (45%). Of those who were at court as friends or family members, most (46%) were at court for a criminal case and 26 percent were at court for a juvenile matter. Witnesses or victims were primarily at court for a criminal, civil, or family law case. Twenty-nine percent (29%) of the survey participants who did not identify themselves by any of the stakeholder categories, also did not identify themselves as at court for any particular matter. Persons in this group include those who indicated that they were at court "to have lunch with a friend," "for a job interview," or "just for fun."

Table 2.12
Type of Matter by Stakeholder
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

	Witness / Victim	Plaintiff / Petitioner	Defendant / Respondent	Friend / Family	Attorney Service	Other
Civil	21%	45%	9%	7%	76%	29%
Probate	4%	3%	<1%	3%	5%	5%
Family Law	13%	46%	13%	14%	8%	12%
Criminal ¹	55%	4%	75%	46%	3%	23%
Juvenile	8%	1%	2%	26%	0%	2%
Other	0%	1%	1%	5%	8%	29%
Respondents	78	611	1,507	561	123	129
¹ Includes traffic matters						
SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments						

Familiarity with Court

To compare the opinions of first-time court users to those who were more familiar with the court, respondents were asked to indicate the number of times they had been to the facility at which they were interviewed. Responses were placed into the following categories: first-time visitor, two to five previous visits, and six or more visits. Additionally, those who indicated they had previously visited the court were also asked to estimate how many months had passed since their last visit. Their responses were categorized in the following manner: one month or less, two to six months, seven to 12 months, and 13 months or more.

Overall, 45 percent of survey respondents had been to the facility between two and five times previously, about one-third (33%) were at court for the first time, and 23 percent had been to the court six times or more (Table 2.13).

Table 2.13
Number of Court Visits
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>Is this the first time you've been to this facility? If not, approximately how many times have you been here before today?</i>		
	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>
First time	33%	992
Two to five	45%	1,360
Six or more	23%	693
Total	101%	3,045
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>		

Number of Visits by Facility. First-time and repeat visitors were also compared across facilities. The percentage of visitors at court for the first time, or two to five times, is similar for most of the courts (Table 2.14). Significant differences were found among those who had been to the court six times or more (ranging from 47% at the Hall of Justice to 5% at the San Marcos facility). As previously noted, many Hall of Justice respondents were from an attorney service filing court actions at the business office, which explains why they had been to the court on numerous occasions.

Table 2.14
Number of Court Visits by Facility
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>Is this the first time you've been to this facility? If not, approximately how many times have you been here before today?</i>										
	East County	South County	Vista	San Marcos	Central Court	Hall of Justice	Family Court	Madge Bradley	Kearny Mesa	Juvenile Court
First time	29%	31%	30%	44%	30%	31%	33%	38%	37%	28%
Two to five	42%	47%	44%	51%	49%	22%	48%	49%	51%	52%
Six or more	29%	22%	26%	5%	21%	47%	19%	14%	12%	20%
Respondents	379	303	276	282	655	351	202	200	203	194
<i>Results significant at .05 percent.</i>										
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>										

Number of Months Since Last Visit. Survey participants who had been to the facility on previous occasions were asked to estimate the number of months that had passed since their last visit. More than half (53%) responded that they had been to the court less than one month prior to the interview (Table 2.15).

Table 2.15
Number of Months Since Last Visit
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>Approximately how long has it been since you have been to this facility?</i>		
	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>
One month or less	53%	1,078
2 to 6 months	21%	423
7 to 12 months	9%	193
13 months or more	17%	356
Total	100%	2,050
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>		

Number of Months Since Last Visit by Facility. Repeat visitors were also compared across facilities. As might be expected, there was a significant difference in respondents at the Hall of Justice who had been to the court during the preceding month (85%) compared to respondents at other facilities (Table 2.16). Other court facilities ranged from 63 percent at the Madge Bradley Facility to 28 percent at the Kearny Mesa Facility.

Table 2.16
Number of Months Since Last Visit by Facility
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>Approximately how long has it been since you have been to this facility?</i>										
	East County	South County	Vista	San Marcos	Central Court	Hall of Justice	Family Court	Madge Bradley	Kearny Mesa	Juvenile Court
One month or less	48%	44%	61%	36%	47%	85%	54%	63%	28%	54%
2 to 6 months	19%	24%	21%	16%	24%	7%	18%	33%	22%	27%
7 to 12 months	11%	13%	8%	11%	11%	4%	10%	3%	10%	10%
13 months or more	22%	19%	10%	37%	18%	3%	17%	1%	40%	9%
Respondents	268	209	193	157	456	243	136	124	125	139
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>										

SUMMARY

The data indicate that a cross section of respondents was obtained from the sampling of court users. The majority of respondents are under 55 years of age, more than half are men (56%), and respondent ethnicity is diverse. More than half of all court users interviewed had attended college or hold a college degree. The type of matter and stakeholder category of respondents generally reflects the types of cases heard at each respective court. The most often interviewed participant is a defendant in a criminal matter (which includes traffic cases). Finally, about one-third (33%) of respondents are first-time visitors to the court and of those who had been to the court previously, more than half had visited the court within the preceding month.

CHAPTER 3

SURVEY RESULTS

SURVEY RESULTS

INTRODUCTION

This venture was a momentous effort by the San Diego Superior Court. The Court proposed to interview more than 3,000 court users to determine their opinions about the capacity of the Court to meet their needs, provide efficient and appropriate services, and to facilitate access to court services. The Court also chose to conduct interviews with respondents both in English and Spanish, as well as in other languages with persons who requested the services of court interpreters, to ensure that the opinions of a variety of court users were included in the analysis.

Consideration was given to the selection of interviewers, which included both males and females of diverse ethnicity and age, in an effort to encourage respondent participation. The research plan was successful in obtaining more than three thousand interviews from a cross section of court users, including those involved in civil and criminal cases, juvenile and adult cases, and men and women of diverse ethnicity who spoke English, Spanish, and other languages. Furthermore, interviews were conducted both in the morning and afternoon and on every day of the workweek to minimize variances based on court calendars. This chapter presents the results of the analyses of these findings.

Issues Addressed in Interviews

The questions identified the reason for coming to the court; the type of respondent, e.g. plaintiff, defendant, witness; how easy or difficult it was to find the facility, courtroom or office; the respondent's opinion of court personnel; and, the adequacy of services received.

Overview of Findings

The findings indicate that court users of the San Diego Superior Court were generally satisfied with the court's services, pleased with the court personnel, able to find their way around, and offered meaningful suggestions for improvements. The responses of survey participants were examined by demographic and case characteristics, and by court facilities. Since there was a high degree of consensus across courts for most questions, limited sub-analyses were conducted.

BUSINESS AT THE COURT

About half of the respondents (45%, 1,350 participants) stated that they had been inside a courtroom (not shown). As noted in the previous chapter, about half of the respondents were at court for a criminal matter (including traffic), 20 percent were at court for a civil matter, and about 19 percent were there for a family law matter (Table 2.8).

Courtroom Visitors

A large majority of respondents who were inside a courtroom (87%) indicated that the proceedings were easy to follow and understand. In fact, only 178 respondents stated otherwise (Table 3.1). When the data are compared across courts and respondent demographics, few differences are noted; however, those of interest are presented below.

Table 3.1
Ability to Understand Proceedings
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>If you were in a courtroom, were the proceedings easy to follow and understand?</i>		
	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>
Yes	87%	1,149
No	13%	178
Total	100%	1,327
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>		

Ability to Understand Proceedings by Ethnicity. With the exception of one ethnic group (Other), 82 percent or more of all ethnic groups thought the proceedings were easy to follow and understand (Table 3.2). Of the 23 respondents in the Other ethnic group, 70 percent still felt the proceedings were easily followed and understood.

Table 3.2
Ability to Understand Proceedings by Ethnicity
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>If you were in a courtroom, were the proceedings easy to follow and understand?</i>					
	<u>African American</u>	<u>Asian</u>	<u>Hispanic</u>	<u>White</u>	<u>Other</u>
Yes	89%	82%	85%	91%	70%
No	11%	18%	15%	9%	30%
Respondents	140	88	669	389	23
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>					

Ability to Understand Proceedings by Language. Over 80 percent of all respondents thought the courtroom proceedings were easy to follow and understand (Table 3.1). However, given that courtroom proceedings are conducted in English, it is not unexpected that a slightly higher percentage of respondents who were interviewed in English, compared to those interviewed in another language, agreed that the proceedings were easy to follow and understand (88% versus 84%) (Table 3.3).

Table 3.3
Ability to Understand Proceedings by Language
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>If you were in a courtroom, were the proceedings easy to follow and understand?</i>		
	<u>English</u>	<u>Other than English</u>
Yes	88%	84%
No	12%	16%
Respondents	813	514
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>		

Ability to Understand Proceedings by Other Characteristics. There were no significant differences in the ability of respondents to understand courtroom proceedings when responses were compared by gender, age, type of case, stakeholder category, attorney representation, number of visits, or across courts.

Business Office Visitors

Respondents were asked if they “conducted any court business outside a courtroom” on the day they were interviewed. Table 3.4 presents the percentage of respondents who indicated they did conduct business at the court (56%). This is nearly the precise complement of the proportion of participants that were inside a courtroom (45%) (previously discussed on page 30). At first glance, based on these findings, it would appear that court visitors were *either* inside a courtroom or conducting other business. However, Table 3.5 dispels that conclusion: thirty-two percent (32%) of respondents who were at court conducting business were *also* inside a courtroom. Interestingly, 39 percent of respondents who said they did *not* conduct court business *also* said they were not inside a courtroom (Table 3.5). When the data were examined further, these respondents were at court for all types of matters, represented each stakeholder category, and spanned all demographic groups. These respondents also include those who came to court to “observe trials,” “look around,” “meet a friend,” and “just for fun.”

Table 3.4
Business Office Visitors
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>Did you conduct any court business outside of a courtroom?</i>		
	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>
Yes	56 %	1,702
No	44 %	1,343
Total	100%	3,045
<i>Results significant at .05 percent.</i>		
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>		

Table 3.5
Business Office Visitors by Courtroom Visitors
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>Did you conduct any court business outside of a courtroom?</i>		
	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
Were inside a courtroom	32%	61%
Were not inside a courtroom	68%	39%
Respondents	1,694	1,339
<i>Results significant at .05 percent.</i>		
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>		

AVAILABILITY OF INFORMATION

The San Diego Superior Court provides several means by which the public can obtain information prior to visiting the court, such as calling the facility, accessing the Court's Internet Web site, and writing a letter to either the business office or the judge. After they have arrived at the facility, visitors also have the following mechanisms available for their use: directories, maps, signs, and staffed "information booths" to assist them in locating the office or courtroom they need. In some instances, the court sends a computer-generated letter, summons, or hearing notice, prior to a court visit.

To examine the respondent's opinion about the availability of information, participants were asked whether or not they utilized any of these different methods of communicating with the court and, if so, how helpful it was to them. If respondents indicated it was **not** helpful, they were asked to provide an explanation or suggestions for improvement.

Received Prior Communication from the Court

Overall, 40 percent of respondents (1,200) received a written communication from the court prior to their visit (See Appendix Table A-2). The majority (68%) of these respondents agreed that the letter provided all of what they needed to know prior to coming to court (Table 3.6). Only six percent reported that the letter provided "none" of what they needed to know before coming to court.

Table 3.6
Usefulness of Letter
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>The letter provided...of what you needed to know to come to court?</i>		
	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>
All	68%	819
Some	26%	315
None	6%	66
Total	100%	1,200
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>		

Usefulness of Letter by Demographic and Case Characteristics. No statistical differences regarding the usefulness of the letter were found among respondents when the data were compared by age group, gender, or ethnicity. The same is true by case type (matter and stakeholder group), In Pro Per respondents, and by familiarity of the facility (first-time or return visitors). This is due in large part to the small number of respondents (66) who indicated the letter provided "none" of what they needed to know (Table 3.6).

Usefulness of Letter by Language. The data were also compared by those who were interviewed in English and those who were interviewed by a court interpreter in another

language. Proportionately *fewer* participants interviewed in English (67%) compared to those interviewed in another language (71%) agreed that the letter provided “all” of what they needed to know prior to coming to court (Table 3.7). However, the results are not statistically significant. The Court is able to provide useful information through its letter to English-speaking court users **and** those who utilize interpreters.

Table 3.7
Usefulness of Letter by Language
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>Did the letter provide all, some or none of what you needed to know?</i>		
	<u>English</u>	<u>Other than English</u>
All	67%	71%
Some	27%	23%
None	5%	6%
Respondents	941	259
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>		

Usefulness of Letter by Facility. The data were also compared across courts to determine if the usefulness of the letter is associated with the facility. The responses “some” and “none” were collapsed into one category. Table 3.8 shows that, after combining the responses, there is a difference in opinion regarding the usefulness of the letter when compared across courts. A greater proportion of Madge Bradley (84%) and Juvenile Court (81%) respondents agreed that the letter **did** provide all of the needed information. In spite of this, there are relatively no similarities between the types of matters heard at these two courts to help explain this finding. The data also show that respondents from three courts in particular were more likely than other court users to indicate that the letter did **not** provide all of what they needed to know (Hall of Justice, 50%; San Marcos, 41%; and Kearny Mesa, 38%). Both the San Marcos and Kearny Mesa Facilities primarily hear traffic matters, which may account for the similarity in this finding. However, this is not the case with the Hall of Justice, which hears a wide variety of civil cases.

Table 3.8
Usefulness of Letter by Facility
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>Did the letter provide all, some or none of what you needed to know?</i>										
	East County	South County	Vista	San Marcos	Central Court	Hall of Justice	Family Court	Madge Bradley	Kearny Mesa	Juvenile Court
All	78%	71%	66%	59%	65%	50%	70%	84%	62%	81%
Some/none	22%	29%	34%	41%	35%	50%	30%	16%	38%	19%
Respondents	162	124	87	175	236	60	53	69	132	102
<i>Results significant at .05 percent.</i>										
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>										

How Could the Letter Be More Helpful?

Participants who said the letter only provided “some” or “none” of what they needed to know were asked how the letter could have been more helpful. Respondents provided a variety of explanations, the summary of which are presented below. The number after each comment indicates the number of respondents who stated a similar reason.

“The letter would have been more helpful if it ...”

- had more information (directions, or phone number) (218)
- was easier to understand (it was confusing) (56)
- was in my language (31)
- would have been correct (it was **incorrect**) (20)
- told me what to expect (5)
- explained step by step solutions to my ticket
- got to me in a timely manner – I got the letter yesterday afternoon
- explained what the hearing was for, and if a person could re-schedule
- said you had to pay in addition to traffic school
- explained what the violation was, exactly
- was sent closer to the date of appearance
- would have told me the correct time to appear (it said '7:15' or '11:15') – you really need to get there as early as you can
- would have been in both English and Spanish.

Actions to Obtain Information Prior to Court Visit

Survey participants were asked a series of questions about their actions to get information prior to coming to court. When asked whether or not they called or wrote the court, accessed the Court's Web site, did something else, or did nothing prior to coming to court, the majority of court users (74%) indicated that they did nothing prior to their arrival at the court (not shown).

Call the Court

The San Diego Superior Court provides, in the local telephone directory, an extensive list of phone numbers to their facilities and administrative offices. Many of the phones at each court are initially answered by an electronic messaging system, also known as a 'phone-tree.' Twenty percent (20%) of survey participants called the court prior to their arrival (Table 3.9).

Internet Web site

The San Diego Superior Court maintains a comprehensive Internet Web site, which provides substantial information to the public regarding the locations of its facilities (including maps), court rules and processes, services provided, employment and volunteer opportunities, press releases, and much more (See Appendix B). The Web site also provides an opportunity for persons seeking resolution of their traffic citation by means of traffic school to complete a course on-line. A listing (and the links) of approved courses are available through their main Web page. The Court took the opportunity of this project to inform respondents of their Internet home page by offering a small pad of Post-it® notes listing their Web site address as a 'thank-you' gift to survey participants.

Analysis of the data reveals that just four percent of court users visited the Web site prior to coming to court (Table 3.9). This may be due in part to a lack of awareness of the site, as well as not knowing that the Court's Web site provides useful information such as an opportunity to complete on-line traffic school and court forms which can be printed out and filed with the court. In fact, interviewers reported to SANDAG researchers that the question about using the Web site often generated a response such as, "I did not know they [the Court] had a Web site."

Write to the Court

Only three percent of respondents wrote to the court or business office prior to their visit, to obtain information regarding their case (Table 3.9).

Other Actions

Respondents were also provided an opportunity to inform the Court of other actions they may have taken to get information about their case. Three percent (3%) reported such

actions as, “spoke to an attorney,” “got information from a friend,” or “looked at a map.” (Table 3.9).

Table 3.9
Actions Prior to Court Visit
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>Prior to coming here today, did you do or use one or more of the following to get information? (Affirmative responses)</i>		
	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>
Call the court	20%	608
Visit Web site	4%	131
Write to court	3%	85
Did something else	3%	97
Respondents		3,045
<i>Percentages are based on multiple responses.</i>		
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>		

Prior Actions by Case and Demographic Characteristics.

Responses were also compared by type of case and demographic characteristics. No statistical difference was found among respondents by age, ethnicity, and stakeholder comparisons. A greater proportion of In Pro Per respondents compared to those represented by an attorney called the court (26% and 17%, respectively); however, differences in their other prior actions were not significant (not shown). Differences by type of matter, number of visits, language, gender, and educational level are presented below.

Prior Actions by Type of Matter. Table 3.10 shows a greater proportion of court visitors involved in either a probate (26%) or family law (25%) matter called the court, compared to those involved in other cases. Differences among case types for visiting the Web site or writing the court were minimal.

Prior Actions by Number of Visits. Although the differences are not statistically significant, Table 3.11 shows that, as might be expected, there appears to be an association between the number of visits and whether or not a visitor contacted the court prior to his or her appearance. First-time visitors (22%) were more likely to call the court than other visitors (20%, two to five visits; 18%, six visits or more). Further analysis was conducted by comparing first-time visitors to all others (regardless of the number of prior visits). Using this approach, statistical significance was achieved for those who called the court (not shown).

Table 3.10
Prior Actions by Type of Matter
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

Prior to coming here today, did you do or use one or more of the following to get information? (Affirmative responses)

	<u>Civil</u>	<u>Probate</u>	<u>Family Law</u>	<u>Criminal¹</u>	<u>Juvenile</u>
Call the court	19%	26%	25%	15%	16%
Visit Web site	6%	7%	4%	4%	0%
Write to court	3%	2%	3%	3%	2%
Respondents	607	58	589	1,490	185

¹ Includes Traffic

Percentages are based on multiple responses. Does not include 'Other' matters.

SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments

Table 3.11
Prior Actions by Number of Visits
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

Prior to coming here today, did you do or use one or more of the following to get information? (Affirmative responses)

	<u>First-time Visitor</u>	<u>Two to Five Visits</u>	<u>Six or More Visits</u>
Call the court	22%	20%	18%
Visit Web site	4%	5%	5%
Write to court	2%	3%	2%
Respondents	992	1,360	693

Percentages are based on multiple responses.

SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments

Prior Actions by Gender. A significantly greater proportion of women (24%) than men (17%) called the court prior to visiting the facility (Table 3.12). Similar percentages of men and women utilized the other two means of contacting the court.

Table 3.12
Prior Actions by Gender
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

Prior to coming here today, did you do or use one or more of the following to get information? (Affirmative responses)

	<u>Men</u>	<u>Women</u>
Call the Court ¹	17%	24%
Visit Web site	5%	4%
Write the court	3%	3%
Respondents	1,691	1,313

¹ Results significant at .05 percent.

Percentages are based on multiple responses.

SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments

Prior Actions by Educational Level. Table 3.13 shows that respondents with higher educational attainment were more likely than others to obtain information from the court before their visit. More than twice the proportion of respondents with a college degree (27%) called the court compared to those who did not graduate from high school (12%).

Table 3.13
Prior Actions by Educational Level
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

Prior to coming here today, did you do or use one or more of the following to get information? (Affirmative responses)

	<u>Less than High School</u>	<u>High School Graduate</u>	<u>Some College</u>	<u>College Degree</u>
Call the court	12%	19%	22%	27%
Visit Web site	4%	2%	4%	8%
Write the court	4%	2%	2%	3%
Respondents	656	680	1,087	594

Results significant at .05 percent.

Percentages are based on multiple responses.

SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments

Prior Actions by Language. Table 3.14 compares the prior actions of respondents interviewed in English to those interviewed in another language. There are statistically significant differences between the two groups. English-speaking court users were more likely than non-English speaking respondents to have called the court. Twenty-two percent (22%) of respondents interviewed in English called the court prior to their visit, compared to 13 percent of those who were interviewed in another language. Conversely, more respondents who interviewed in another language (5%) wrote to the court compared to two percent of those interviewed in English.

Table 3.14
Prior Actions by Language
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>Prior to coming here today, did you do or use one or more of the following to get information? (Affirmative responses)</i>		
	<u>English</u>	<u>Other than English</u>
Call the court ¹	22 %	13 %
Visit Web site	4 %	5 %
Write the court ¹	2 %	5 %
Respondents	2,374	671
¹ Results significant at .05 percent.		
Percentages are based on multiple responses.		
SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments		

Prior Actions by Facility

Table 3.15 shows that there are differences in respondents' prior actions when the data are examined across courts. A greater percentage of San Marcos and Kearny Mesa respondents (32% and 30%, respectively) called the court. This difference may be partially explained by the type of matters handled at these courts; that is, misdemeanor traffic and small claims cases. As for the other methods of communication, it should be noted that few respondents used either the Web site or wrote the court, and therefore caution should be observed when comparing these results by percentage points (representing a relatively small number of affirmative responses distributed among ten facilities).

Table 3.15
Prior Actions by Facility
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

Prior to coming here today, did you do or use one or more of the following to get information? (Affirmative responses)

	East County	South County	Vista	San Marcos	Central Court	Hall of Justice	Family Court	Madge Bradley	Kearny Mesa	Juvenile Court
Call the court	16%	14%	26%	32%	17%	16%	25%	18%	30%	14%
Visit Web site	2%	1%	8%	5%	2%	7%	6%	4%	5%	0%
Write the court	2%	1%	5%	5%	2%	3%	2%	1%	2%	2%
Respondents	379	303	276	282	655	351	202	200	203	194

Percentages are based on multiple responses. Results significant at .05 percent.

SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments

Helpfulness of Prior Actions

Survey participants who indicated that they had utilized one of these means of communicating with the court were asked how helpful the method was in providing information. Overall, 65 percent of those who called the court said it was helpful in providing information (Table 3.16). About the same percentage (59%) indicated the Web site was helpful, and 48 percent said writing the court was helpful. About one-third or more reported that the action they took to obtain information was not helpful (ranging from 40% of those who wrote the court to 27% of Web site users).

Table 3.16
Helpfulness of Prior Actions
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

How helpful was the following?

	<u>Call the Court</u>	<u>Visit Web Site</u>	<u>Write the Court</u>
Helpful	65 %	59%	48 %
Neither	7%	13%	12 %
Not helpful	28 %	27%	40 %
Respondents	597	128	83

SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments

Why Not Helpful? Survey participants who indicated that communication with the court was not helpful were also asked to provide an explanation. Similar responses are presented in Table 3.17. Percentages are based on the total number of respondents who provided an explanation (131). Responses were not separated by type of method used; instead they were grouped by similar reasons. For example, the response, “no answer,” applies to both those who called the court and those who wrote the court. The difficulty in ascertaining commonalties for the lack of usefulness of prior communication with the court stems from two reasons. First, few respondents wrote the court or used the Web site and, secondly, of those, most indicated that it was helpful (as presented in the previous table). Also, some respondents who stated that it was not helpful did not provide any further explanation.

Table 3.17
Why Prior Actions Were Not Helpful
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>Why wasn't it helpful?</i>		
	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>
No answer	34%	44
Couldn't access	26%	34
Insufficient information	17%	22
Other	24%	31
Total	100%	131
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>		

Other Comments. The following quotes represent the majority of other comments offered by survey participants as to why communication with the court was not helpful.

- “The phone was always busy.”
- “I could not talk to an actual person on the phone.”
- “The phone tree did not give me the phone number I needed.”
- “The phone number I was given was wrong.”
- “Computer automated phone service, I hate it.”
- “Calling the court was not helpful, because I could not get an operator.”
- “The Web site was confusing, and did not supply the information I wanted.”
- “The answering machine was only in English” (Note: this respondent was interviewed in Spanish).

Actions to Obtain Information After Arrival

As previously stated, the office directories, maps, and/or staffed information booths are available at court facilities to assist visitors in locating the office or courtroom they need. In an effort to assess the effectiveness and availability of information at each facility, survey participants were asked if they utilized these aids after their arrival and, if so, how well it assisted them. Respondents who indicated it was **not** helpful were also asked to provide information as to why not.

Ask for Help

More than one-half (52%) of all respondents asked someone to assist them in locating the office or courtroom they needed (Table 3.18). This includes those who asked security officers stationed at the entrance of each facility, staff (volunteer or employees) located at an information booth, or anyone they happened to encounter.

Directories, Maps, and Signs

Directories, maps, and signs are available for court users at each facility. However, given that each court has different physical characteristics, it is logical that these items are located in various places and are different in appearance (dependent on the age of the building, or remodeling). Overall, 26 percent of court visitors used a directory, a map, and/or a sign to locate the office or courtroom they needed (Table 3.18).

Table 3.18
Actions After Arrival to Court
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>Once inside the building, did you do or use one or more of the following to locate the office or courtroom you needed? (Affirmative responses)</i>		
	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>
Ask someone	52%	1,595
Directory, Maps, Signs	26%	779
Other	1%	44
Respondents		3,045
<i>Percentages are based on multiple responses.</i>		
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>		

Actions to Obtain Information After Arrival by Case and Demographic Characteristics

Respondents' actions to obtain information after their arrival to court were further compared by case and demographic characteristics. No statistical differences were found among survey participants by age, ethnicity, gender, and stakeholder comparisons. Differences that were statistically significant when the data were compared by type of matter, number of visits, attorney representation, language, and education, are described below.

Actions at Court by Type of Matter. Table 3.19 shows that a greater percentage of respondents at court for a juvenile matter (75%) asked someone for assistance than those who came to court for other matters (ranging from 54% for a criminal matter to 40% (23 respondents) for a probate matter). There is a ten-point percentage difference among those who utilized a directory, maps, or signs for assistance (ranging from 31% for probate matters to 21% for civil matters).

Table 3.19
Actions at Court by Type of Matter
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>Once inside the building, did you do or use one or more of the following to locate the office or courtroom you needed? (Affirmative responses)</i>					
	<u>Civil</u>	<u>Probate</u>	<u>Family Law</u>	<u>Criminal¹</u>	<u>Juvenile</u>
Ask someone	45%	40%	52%	54%	75%
Directory, Maps, Signs	21%	31%	28%	26%	28%
Respondents	607	58	589	1,490	185
¹ Includes Traffic					
Percentages are based on multiple responses. Results significant at .05 percent.					
SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments					

Actions at Court by Number of Visits. Predictably, nearly twice as many first-time visitors asked for assistance in locating the office or courtroom they needed (64%) compared to those who had been to the court at least six times previously (33%) (Table 3.20). However, the differences are not as stark when first-time visitors are compared to those who had been to the court between two and five visits (64% and 54%, respectively). Similar results are found when the frequency of visits is compared by those who use the assistance of a directory, map, or sign. As expected, as the number of visits increases, the proportion of respondents who utilize one of these methods of obtaining information decreases.

Table 3.20
Actions at Court by Number of Visits
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>Once inside the building, did you do or use one or more of the following to locate the office or courtroom you needed? (Affirmative responses)</i>			
	<u>First-time</u> <u>Visitor</u>	<u>Two to Five</u> <u>Visits</u>	<u>Six or More</u> <u>Visits</u>
Ask someone	64%	54%	33%
Directory, Maps, Signs	28%	28%	18%
Respondents	991	1,358	690
<i>Percentages are based on multiple responses. Results significant at .05 percent.</i>			
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>			

Actions at Court by Attorney Representation. Individuals who arrive at court for a matter in which they are a litigant (Petitioner/Plaintiff or Respondent/Defendant) are either represented by an attorney or handle the matter themselves. It is common practice to define those who are not represented by an attorney as “In Pro Per.” More respondents represented by an attorney (60%) compared to In Pro Per litigants (51%) asked someone for assistance (Table 3.21). However, those represented by an attorney may not have made a distinction between asking their attorney for help or asking court personnel. Conversely, a greater proportion (27%) of In Pro Per participants utilized a directory, map, or sign compared to those with an attorney (21%).

Table 3.21
Actions at Court by Attorney Representation
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>Once inside the building, did you do or use one or more of the following to locate the office or courtroom you needed? (Affirmative responses)</i>		
	<u>In Pro Per</u>	<u>Attorney</u> <u>Represented</u>
Ask someone	51%	60%
Directory, Maps, Signs	27%	21%
Respondents	1,644	424
<i>Results significant at .05 percent.</i>		
<i>Percentages are based on multiple responses.</i>		
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>		

Actions at Court by Educational Level. Table 3.22 shows that respondents with lower educational levels are more likely to ask for help than respondents with higher education. Over two-thirds (68%) of those who did not complete high school asked someone for assistance compared to 46 percent of those who had college level education.

Table 3.22
Actions at Court by Educational Level
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>Once inside the building, did you do or use one or more of the following to locate the office or courtroom you needed? (Affirmative responses)</i>				
	<u>Less than High School</u>	<u>High School Graduate</u>	<u>Some College</u>	<u>College Degree</u>
Ask someone	68%	53%	46%	46%
Directory, Maps, Signs	8%	44%	28%	4%
Respondents	656	680	1,087	594
<i>Percentages are based on multiple responses. Results significant at .05 percent.</i>				
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>				

Actions at Court by Language. There is a significant difference in the proportion of respondents who were interviewed by a court interpreter and asked someone for assistance (68%) than those interviewed in English (48%) (Table 3.23). There is no statistical difference in the comparative percentage that used a directory, map, or sign to find the office or courtroom they needed.

Table 3.23
Actions at Court by Language
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>Once inside the building, did you do or use one or more of the following to locate the office or courtroom you needed? (Affirmative responses)</i>		
	<u>English</u>	<u>Other than English</u>
Ask someone ¹	48%	68%
Directory, Maps, Signs	26%	25%
Respondents	2,374	671
¹ Results significant at .05 percent.		
<i>Percentages are based on multiple responses.</i>		
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>		

Prior Actions by Facility

Table 3.24 shows that there are differences in respondents' actions at court to locate the office or courtroom they need when the data are compared among facilities. There is wide range in the proportion of respondents who either asked someone for assistance or used a directory, map, or sign. For example, the proportion of respondents who asked someone for assistance ranged from 77 percent at Juvenile Court to 29 percent at San Marcos. Similarly, the proportion who used a directory, map, or sign ranged from 42 percent at Kearney Mesa to 18 percent at Central Court.

Table 3.24
Actions at Court by Facility
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>Once inside the building, did you do or use one or more of the following to locate the office or courtroom you needed?</i> <i>(Affirmative responses)</i>										
	East County	South County	Vista	San Marcos	Central Court	Hall of Justice	Family Court	Madge Bradley	Kearny Mesa	Juvenile Court
Ask someone	59%	44%	60%	29%	63%	38%	53%	41%	54%	77%
Directory, Maps, Signs	24%	24%	35%	35%	18%	15%	31%	26%	42%	26%
Respondents	379	303	276	282	655	351	202	200	203	194
<i>Percentages are based on multiple responses. Results significant at .05 percent.</i>										
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>										

Helpfulness of Prior Actions

Survey participants who indicated they had asked someone or had used a directory, map, or sign to locate the office or courtroom they needed were also asked how helpful it was in providing information. Those that indicated it was not helpful were also asked to explain "why not." As shown on Table 3.25, an overwhelming majority of court visitors who used either of these methods said it was helpful in providing information. Ninety-five percent (95%) who asked someone and 88 percent who used a directory, map, or sign said it was helpful. Differences among demographic and case characteristics were not statistically significant due to the large percentage of respondents who found it helpful overall.

Table 3.25
Helpfulness of Actions at Court
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>How helpful was the following?</i>		
	Directory, Maps, <u>Signs</u>	<u>Ask Someone</u>
Helpful	88%	95%
Neither	5%	3%
Not helpful	7%	3%
Respondents	752	1,511
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>		

Why Not Helpful? Survey participants who provided similar reasons as to why the method of obtaining information at the court was not helpful are presented in Table 3.26. Percentages are based on the total number of respondents who provided an explanation (74) and should be viewed with caution given the small number who *did not* find the methods helpful.

Table 3.26
Why Actions at Court Were Not Helpful
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>Why wasn't the directory, maps, signs, or someone inside, helpful?</i>		
	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>
Not clear	38%	28
Didn't have what I needed	19%	14
Couldn't find it (them)	12%	9
Other	31%	23
Total	100%	74
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>		

Other Comments. The following quotes represent the majority of other comments offered by survey participants as to why these methods of communication were not helpful. The comments are presented separately, by those interviewed in English and by those interviewed by an interpreter in another language, to provide more meaningful information for the Court.

Interviewed in English:

- “The signs are confusing, they do not tell you where to stand in line.”
- “Signs on the (outside) windows are incorrect.”
- “The person I asked did not know where I should go.”
- “There was nobody on duty at the information desk at mid-day.”
- “Both the maps and signs had bad information.”
- “The person I spoke with was very rude.”
- “The person at the information desk kept reading a newspaper, was no help.”
- “I tried to ask someone at the information desk, but they did not get off the phone.”
- “The person at the information desk was busy on phone.”

Interviewed by interpreter:

- “The citation indicated that I should wait in the lobby, so I followed directions on the citation and waited in the lobby, but no one came out.”
- “I had to ask someone and was told to come here and everyone passed the buck around.”
- “They sent me from one place to another.”
- “I had to go to the Marshal’s Office first.”
- “I waited at the information desk for over 40 minutes and then they did not help me.”

Summary of Availability of Information

The findings presented regarding the availability of information indicate that in spite of differences among case types, court facilities, and individual demographics, the majority of court users who attempt to get information are able to do so prior to coming to court and, once at court, are able to obtain assistance to locate the office or courtroom they need. Survey participants provided informative suggestions to the San Diego Superior Court to enable them to improve methods of providing information to their court users.

FINDING THEIR WAY AROUND

The Court sought to ascertain the ability of its users to find their way to the facility and locate the office or courtroom they needed. The questions were placed in the survey just after participants were asked about what they did prior to coming to court and after arriving at court, to direct their recollection of the difficulty or ease they experienced. Additionally, respondents were asked how easy it was to find the *right* facility or office, and interviewers were trained to accentuate the word “right” when asking the question. This was done to inhibit respondents who might have answered that it was “easy” to find the facility or office, but who were not at the correct location. Response categories “very easy” and “somewhat easy” were collapsed into “easy;” and “not very easy” and “not easy at all” were collapsed into “not easy.”

Finding the Building

Overall, 92 percent of participants said that finding the right building was easy and five percent indicated that it was not easy (Table 3.27). The data were also examined by the original response category. The proportion who thought it was “very easy” was 77 percent, and those who answered “somewhat easy” was 15 percent (not shown). Therefore, the majority of court users are able to find the correct facility with ease.

Table 3.27
Finding the Building
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>How easy was it find the right building?</i>		
	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>
Easy	92%	2,794
Neither	3%	86
Not easy	5%	155
Total	100%	3,035
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>		

Finding the Building by Case and Demographic Characteristics

Due to the very high proportion of respondents who easily found the right building, no statistical differences were noted among respondents when the data were compared by case and demographic characteristics. As expected, a greater proportion of respondents who had been to the court previously (94%) thought it was easy to find the right building compared to those who were at the facility for the first time (88%) (not shown).

Finding the Building by Facility

Respondents' ease in finding the right building was also compared across courts. At least 95 percent of respondents visiting the East County, South County, Family Court, Kearny Mesa, and Juvenile Court facilities easily found the correct facilities (Table 3.28). A greater proportion of San Marcos (12%) and Madge Bradley (8%) participants indicated that it was not easy to find the right building. It should be noted that both of these facilities do not have a traditional courthouse appearance, which might explain the higher proportion who thought it more difficult to find those two court buildings. The courthouse in San Marcos was converted from its previous use as an office building. The Madge Bradley Facility was designed to make the most efficient use of a small lot and as a consequence it is similar in appearance to the office buildings located nearby.

Table 3.28
Finding the Building by Facility
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>How easy was it to find the right building?</i>										
	East County	South County	Vista	San Marcos	Central Court	Hall of Justice	Family Court	Madge Bradley	Kearny Mesa	Juvenile Court
Easy	95%	96%	92%	84%	90%	91%	95%	90%	96%	96%
Neither	2%	2%	4%	4%	4%	3%	2%	2%	1%	1%
Not easy	2%	2%	4%	12%	6%	6%	3%	8%	3%	4%
Respondents	377	303	276	281	653	349	202	199	202	193

SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments

Why Not Easy to Find the Right Building? Survey participants who indicated that it was not easy to find the right facility were also asked to provide information describing the difficulty they encountered. The majority (77 respondents) simply said that it was “just confusing” and provided no other details (not shown). Other respondents (29) said the street signs were the problem, or that the markings on the buildings were not clear, not visible, or incorrect (20). The following quotes represent additional comments offered by respondents regarding the difficulty in finding the right facility:

- “...one-way streets and parking at Family Court.”
- “...it is hard to get to this facility (Juvenile Court) without a car and the public transportation is bad.”
- “It does not say in bold letters ‘Hall of Justice’ or ‘Courthouse.’”
- “The building is small and hard to spot.” (Family Court)
- “It says on the paper, ‘1501 6th Street,’ but the building number is 1555.”
- “I’ve never been here before.”

Finding the Office or Courtroom

Similar to the results about finding the right building, interviewers were also trained to accentuate the word “right” when asking about finding the office or courtroom, and response categories were collapsed into “easy” and “not easy.”

Overall, 92 percent of survey participants said that finding the *right* office or courtroom was easy and five percent indicated that it was not easy (Table 3.29). The data were also examined by the original response category. The proportion who answered “very easy,” was 74 percent, and those who answered “somewhat easy” was 18 percent (not shown). These results show that the majority of court users are easily able to find the correct office or courtroom.

Table 3.29
Finding the Office or Courtroom
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>How easy was it find the right office or courtroom?</i>		
	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>
Easy	92%	2,797
Neither	3%	99
Not easy	5%	140
Total	100%	3,036
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>		

Finding the Office or Courtroom by Case and Demographic Characteristics

The results are very similar to those who said finding the right building was easy. Due to the low percentage of respondents who did **not** think it was easy, there were no statistical differences in responses when the data were examined by case type and demographic characteristics.

Finding the Office or Courtroom by Facility

Respondents’ ability to find the right office or courtroom varied slightly across courts (Table 3.30). At least 89 percent of respondents at each facility said it was easy to find the right office or courtroom. The greatest proportion of respondents who said it was not easy was only seven percent, which was at both the East County and Central Court facilities.

Table 3.30
Finding the Office or Courtroom by Facility
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

*How easy was it to find the **office or courtroom**?*

	East County	South County	Vista	San Marcos	Central Court	Hall of Justice	Family Court	Madge Bradley	Kearny Mesa	Juvenile Court
Easy	91%	95%	95%	94%	89%	93%	93%	96%	96%	96%
Neither	2%	3%	2%	3%	5%	2%	3%	1%	1%	1%
Not easy	7%	2%	3%	4%	7%	5%	4%	4%	3%	3%
Respondents	379	302	276	278	655	351	202	200	199	194

SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments

Why Not Easy to Find the Right Office or Courtroom? Survey participants who indicated finding the right office was “not easy” were asked to provide an explanation of the difficulty they encountered. Similar to those who said it was not easy to find the building, the majority (65 respondents) said it was “just confusing” with no other details provided (not shown). Forty-one (41) said the signs were the problem and 24 stated that the markings on the rooms or offices were not clear, not correct, or not visible. The following quotes represent the majority of other comments offered by respondents.

- “The offices at the Hall of Justice are hard to find due to the numbering system and lack of signs. The courtrooms are not numbered according to the floor they are on. For example: '2x' should be on 2nd floor and '3x' should be on 3rd floor.”
- “The receptionist did not give exact instructions.”
- “I was sent here, there, everywhere.”
- “I was given the wrong directions.”
- “I did not know where the office was located.”
- “...could not find the City Attorney and did not know where to go”
- “...too difficult to get to the business office at Family Court - it’s like a maze”

BARRIERS TO ACCESS

The Court wanted to know if court users experience any barriers to accessing their offices or facilities due to physical disabilities, the costs associated with court business, or because of their feelings of safety inside the building. The results show that the majority of users do not experience any of these barriers accessing the courts. The findings leading to this conclusion are presented in this section of the report.

Using the Facilities

Survey participants were asked, “Have you experienced any problems entering, leaving, or using the facilities of the court?” The question was posed to determine if persons with physical disabilities, in particular, experience problems accessing the court’s facilities or services. Interviewers were trained **not** to draw attention to someone’s visible disability (which might embarrass a participant), or to lead them into a suggestive response. If a respondent asked for clarification of the question such as “What kind of problems?,” they were told, “Whatever the question means to you.”

Overall, very few (14) respondents stated that they experienced any problems using the facilities due to a physical disability. For the most part, those who did say they experienced some problems addressed non-physical issues such as “the metal detector was too sensitive” (46 respondents), and “the lines are too long” (24 respondents) (not shown). The following represent some of the other comments offered by respondents.

- “Going back and forth between buildings, and going up and down stairs, my back hurts a little.” (Central Court and Hall of Justice)
- “I did not really care for the back entrance or way out.” (San Marcos)
- American Sign Language respondent: “A woman behind the window took the wrong paper from me, refused to give it back, refused to ‘write’ with me.”
- Interviewed in Spanish: “Bathroom and cafeteria signs are not visible and everything is in English.”
- “Lighting in the courtrooms is too low.”
- “Some [courtrooms] close earlier than expected.”
- “Street vendors are selling flowers outside – it’s harassing.” (Central Court)
- “Peace officers should speak louder: I did not hear the instructions.”
- “The escalator was being repaired; needs posted detour signs.” (Hall of Justice)
- “...pushing and pulling heavy doors; I have arthritis in my arm.”

Feelings of Safety

Due to the serious nature of court matters, the Court and Sheriff's Department strive to ensure court users' safety through the use of metal detectors, the screening of hand-carried items, and posting law enforcement personnel at every entrance and in every courtroom. Results from the survey indicate that, overall, 95 percent agreed that they felt safe in the building (Table 3.31). Only *two percent* of survey participants indicated that they did not feel safe. Differences between In Pro Per respondents, number of visits, demographic and case characteristics were not significant due to the high percentage of court users who felt safe. Differences across courts were also minor (ranging from 93% to 97% who felt safe) (not shown).

Table 3.31
Feelings of Safety
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>You felt safe in this building today.</i>		
	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>
Agree	95%	2,841
Neither	3%	86
Disagree	2%	72
Total	100%	2,999
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>		

Barriers Due to Cost

The Court was concerned that some people might be deterred from accessing court services because they are unable to afford the related costs (excluding fines and legal representation). However, the results from the survey show that most court users (89%) did not think cost was a factor (Table 3.32). Although eleven percent of survey participants did say there was business they could not afford to conduct, this proportion was inflated by those who said they could not hire legal services (105 respondents) and could not pay their fine (77 respondents) (Table 3.33). The Court does not have control over the cost of legal representation, or the statutes which set forth fines and penalty assessments. The Court is most concerned about users who are unable to *conduct business* such as filing a court action (58 respondents) (Table 3.33). A variety of topics were mentioned by other respondents such as the cost of transcripts, the cost of making copies from case files, and filing fees. Several respondents also said they could not afford to "change their name" because the cost (\$195) was too high.

The small proportion of those who said they could not afford the cost of doing business was also examined by case and demographic characteristics with no significant findings. The same was true when the data were examined across courts, although the highest percentage was at Family Court (21%) (not shown). This is partially explained by the comment of some respondents who mentioned the "high price of child support."

Table 3.32
Could Not Afford Cost of Court Business
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>Is there any business you couldn't do because you couldn't afford it?</i>		
	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>
Yes	11%	329
No	89%	2,699
Total	100%	3,028
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>		

Table 3.33
Costs Identified As Not Affordable
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>What business couldn't you afford to conduct?</i>		
	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>
Hire legal services	38%	105
Fine	28%	77
File court action	21%	58
Other	12%	33
Total	100%	273
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>		

Summary of Barriers to Access

Most people are not deterred from accessing the court's services due to a physical disability, feelings of safety, or costs related to court services. Furthermore, court users who do have some concerns regarding costs, for the most part were concerned about issues not related to *services* provided by the Court. For example, many of the respondents who said costs were too high were referring to the cost of legal representation and fines. Overall, court users are able to enter, use, and access the court without any significant problems.

PERCEPTIONS OF STAFF COURTESY AND COURT SERVICES

An important aspect of someone's visit to court is his/her experiences with staff. To measure respondents' satisfaction with the court personnel and the services provided, survey participants were asked a series of five questions related to the courteousness and friendliness of staff, and two questions related to the adequacy of information and sufficiency of staff. To help explain the findings, responses were compared by case type, stakeholder group, number of visits to the facility, legal representation, and respondent demographics.

All seven questions were presented on a five point Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Participants were asked if court personnel are "friendly and courteous," "available to answer your questions," "know the answers to your questions," "provide prompt service at the counters," "take time to explain things to you," and "provide adequate information about its procedures and services." Respondents were also asked if the court has "adequate staff to do its job." The results from each question were evaluated individually and are presented in this section of the report.

Overall, at least 2,919 respondents (96%) answered **all five questions** regarding the friendliness and helpfulness of court personnel (not shown). Of those respondents, 79 percent or more agreed that court personnel are friendly and courteous, available, prompt, knowledgeable, and take time to explain things (not shown). These results demonstrate the high level of satisfaction court users have with the staff they encounter. Each question was also evaluated independently, the results of which are presented in this section of the report.

Friendly and Courteous

Eighty-eight percent (88%) of court users agree that court personnel are friendly and courteous (Table 3.34). No differences were observed when the data were examined by case and demographic characteristics.

Table 3.34
Friendliness of Court Personnel
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>Court personnel are friendly and courteous.</i>		
	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>
Agree	88%	2,657
Neither	7%	205
Disagree	5%	150
Total	100%	3,012
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>		

Friendly and Courteous by Facility. Although at least 80 percent of court users at each facility agree that court personnel are friendly and courteous, some differences are noted (Table 3.35). For example, the percentage of respondents who agree with the question ranges from 93 percent at the East County facility to 81 percent at Family Court.

Table 3.35
Friendliness of Court Personnel by Facility
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>Court personnel are friendly and courteous.</i>										
	East County	South County	Vista	San Marcos	Central Court	Hall of Justice	Family Court	Madge Bradley	Kearny Mesa	Juvenile Court
Agree	93%	89%	91%	87%	87%	91%	81%	84%	85%	89%
Neither	6%	7%	5%	7%	8%	5%	9%	8%	7%	5%
Disagree	2%	4%	4%	5%	5%	4%	10%	8%	7%	6%
Respondents	374	302	274	282	640	349	198	198	201	194
<i>Results significant at .05 percent.</i>										
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>										

Available to Answer Questions

The majority of court users (84%) agree that court personnel are available to answer their questions (Table 3.36). The only differences were by the number of visits to the facility (Table 3.37) and language (Table 3.38).

Table 3.36
Availability of Court Personnel
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>Court personnel are available to answer your questions.</i>		
	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>
Agree	84%	2,487
Neither	8%	243
Disagree	8%	227
Total	100%	2,957
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>		

Availability of Court Personnel by Number of Visits. There is an inverse relationship between number of visits to a court facility and the level of agreement that court personnel are available to answer questions (Table 3.37). As the number of visits *increases*, the proportion of those who agree with the statement *decreases*.

Table 3.37
Availability of Court Personnel by Number of Visits
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>Court personnel are available to answer your questions.</i>			
	First-time Visitor	Two to Five Visits	Six or More Visits
Agree	86%	85%	80%
Neither	8%	8%	10%
Disagree	6%	7%	11%
Respondents	955	1,326	676
<i>Results significant at .05 percent.</i>			
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>			

Availability of Court Personnel by Language. A larger proportion of respondents interviewed in another language (88%) agreed that court personnel are available to answer their questions than those interviewed in English (83%) (Table 3.38). This finding may be due in part to those respondents who were interviewed in another language having the assistance and availability of a court interpreter.

Table 3.38
Availability of Court Personnel by Language
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>Court personnel are available to answer your questions.</i>		
	English	Other than English
Agree	83%	88%
Neither	8%	7%
Disagree	8%	5%
Respondents	2,313	644
<i>Results significant at .05 percent.</i>		
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>		

Availability of Court Personnel by Facility. The data were also compared by court facility, and although the differences are not statistically significant, they are presented to describe the variances among courts. Table 3.39 shows there is a ten-point percentage difference in those who agree court personnel are available to answer questions (from 87% at the East County and Vista facilities to 77% at Family Court).

Table 3.39
Availability of Court Personnel by Facility
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>Court personnel are available to answer your questions.</i>										
	East County	South County	Vista	San Marcos	Central Court	Hall of Justice	Family Court	Madge Bradley	Kearny Mesa	Juvenile Court
Agree	87%	85%	87%	85%	85%	84%	77%	81%	84%	82%
Neither	6%	7%	7%	7%	8%	10%	9%	8%	9%	12%
Disagree	7%	8%	6%	8%	7%	6%	13%	11%	8%	5%
Respondents	356	298	272	279	629	346	193	196	195	193
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>										

Knowledgeable Court Personnel

Eighty-one percent (81%) of court users agreed that court personnel know the answer to their questions (Table 3.40). Differences in respondents' opinions were noted when the data were examined by language (Table 3.41) and number of visits (Table 3.42).

Table 3.40
Knowledgeable Court Personnel
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>Court personnel know the answers to your questions.</i>		
	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>
Agree	81%	2,350
Neither	10%	298
Disagree	9%	271
Total	100%	2,919
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>		

Knowledgeable Court Personnel by Case and Demographic Characteristics. An evaluation of case type and demographic characteristics produced some differences. More men than women (82% versus 78%) agreed (not shown), and more respondents interviewed in another language agreed with this statement than those interviewed in English (85% versus 79%) (Table 3.41). One possible explanation for the difference by language is that non-English speaking respondents had an interpreter who might have assisted them in obtaining information from court clerks and other staff. When the data were compared by number of visits to the facility, an inverse relationship was noted. That is, as the number of visits *increases*, the proportion who agree court personnel know the answer to their questions *decreases* (Table 3.42).

Table 3.41
Knowledgeable Court Personnel by Language
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>Court personnel know the answers to your questions.</i>		
	<u>English</u>	<u>Other than English</u>
Agree	79%	85%
Neither	11%	9%
Disagree	10%	7%
Respondents	2,286	636
<i>Results significant at .05 percent.</i>		
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>		

Table 3.42
Knowledgeable Court Personnel by Number of Visits
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>Court personnel know the answers to your questions.</i>			
	<u>First-time Visitor</u>	<u>Two to Five Visits</u>	<u>Six or More Visits</u>
Agree	83%	81%	75%
Neither	8%	10%	14%
Disagree	8%	9%	11%
Respondents	931	1,320	671
<i>Results significant at .05 percent.</i>			
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>			

Knowledgeable Court Personnel by Facility. When the data are examined across courts, there are some differences in the proportion of respondents who agree court personnel know the answers to their questions (Table 3.43). However, the differences are not statistically significant and are presented for informational purposes only. There is a ten-point percentage difference in the proportion who agreed (ranging from 86% at the South and East County facilities to 76% at Family Court); and a five-point percentage difference in those who did not agree (ranging from 12% at Family Court to 7% at the East County facility).

Table 3.43
Knowledgeable Court Personnel by Facility
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>Court personnel know the answers to your questions.</i>										
	East County	South County	San Vista	San Marcos	Central Court	Hall of Justice	Family Court	Madge Bradley	Kearny Mesa	Juvenile Court
Agree	86%	86%	80%	82%	79%	78%	76%	77%	81%	80%
Neither	7%	6%	12%	7%	12%	13%	12%	13%	10%	11%
Disagree	7%	9%	9%	11%	9%	9%	12%	10%	9%	8%
Respondents	355	293	269	274	617	342	192	193	190	194
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>										

Provide Prompt Service

Another concern of the Court was the opinion of respondents regarding the promptness of service received at the clerks' counters. The majority of respondents did agree that court personnel provide prompt service (77%) (Table 3.44). However, 12 percent disagreed and eleven percent neither agreed nor disagreed.

Table 3.44
Prompt Service at Counter
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>Court personnel provide prompt service at the counters.</i>		
	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>
Agree	77%	2,270
Neither	11%	308
Disagree	12%	352
Total	100%	2,930
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>		

Prompt Service by Case and Demographic Characteristics. The opinion of court users regarding prompt service was also examined by case and demographic characteristics, which produced some findings of significance. A greater proportion of visitors who were at the facility for the first time (81%) compared to those who had been to the facility six times or more (73%) agreed that court personnel provide prompt service (Table 3.45). Also, more In Pro Per respondents (79%) compared those represented by an attorney (68%) agreed court personnel provide prompt service (Table 3.46). At first, this seems like a peculiar finding because In Pro Per respondents must wait in line to see a clerk while those with an attorney do not need to wait (attorneys have separate clerks' counters and drop boxes). However, the difference in the data comes from the proportion who responded "neither agree or disagree" (17% with an attorney compared to 9% In Pro Per), which makes more sense because those with an attorney may not be aware of the promptness of service their attorney received at the counter. Other demographic and case type differences were not significant.

Table 3.45
Prompt Service at Counter by Number of Visits
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>Court personnel provide prompt service at the counters.</i>			
	First-time Visitor	Two to Five Visits	Six or More Visits
Agree	81%	77%	73%
Neither	11%	10%	11%
Disagree	8%	13%	16%
Respondents	940	1,321	669
<i>Results significant at .05 percent.</i>			
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>			

Table 3.46
Prompt Service at Counter by Attorney Representation
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>Court personnel provide prompt service at the counters.</i>		
	In Pro Per	Attorney Represented
Agree	79%	68%
Neither	8%	17%
Disagree	14%	14%
Respondents	1,607	406
<i>Results significant at .05 percent.</i>		
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>		

Prompt Service by Facility. The data were also compared across courts (Table 3.47). The proportion of respondents who agreed that court personnel provide prompt service ranged from 87 percent at Juvenile Court to 68 percent at Central Court. A ten-point percentage difference was also found among those who disagreed, ranging from 17 percent at the Kearny Mesa Facility to seven percent at the Hall of Justice and Juvenile Court.

Table 3.47
Prompt Service at Counter by Facility
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>Court personnel provide prompt service at the counters.</i>										
	East County	South County	Vista	San Marcos	Central Court	Hall of Justice	Family Court	Madge Bradley	Kearny Mesa	Juvenile Court
Agree	86%	79%	76%	76%	68%	86%	76%	75%	74%	87%
Neither	6%	8%	13%	8%	18%	8%	12%	11%	8%	6%
Disagree	8%	14%	12%	16%	14%	7%	12%	14%	17%	7%
Respondents	367	294	268	282	600	346	191	192	196	194

Results significant at .05 percent.
SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments

Court Personnel Explain Things

The results of questions regarding court personnel have so far indicated that a significant majority of court users think court personnel are friendly, available, and knowledgeable. The Court also thought it was important to learn the opinion of respondents as to whether or not court personnel take time to explain things to persons requesting information. Eighty percent (80%) agreed court personnel do take time to explain things (Table 3.48).

Table 3.48
Court Personnel Explain Things
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>Court personnel take time to explain things to you.</i>		
	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>
Agree	80%	2,354
Neither	9%	276
Disagree	10%	296
Total	100%	2,926

SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments

Court Personnel Explain Things by Case and Demographic Characteristics. Again, as with previous questions regarding court personnel, a greater proportion of court users who were at the facility for the first time (83%) compared to those who had been to the facility six times or more (75%) agreed that court personnel take time to provide an explanation (Table 3.49). Other differences in demographic and case type characteristics did not produce any statistically significant findings.

Table 3.49
Court Personnel Explain Things by Number of Visits
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>Court personnel take time to explain things to you.</i>			
	First-time Visitor	Two to Five Visits	Six or More Visits
Agree	83%	81%	75%
Neither	8%	9%	12%
Disagree	9%	10%	12%
Respondents	937	1,317	672
<i>Results significant at .05 percent.</i>			
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>			

Court Personnel Explain Things by Facility. When the data were evaluated across courts, a significant difference was found. The proportion who agreed that court personnel explain things ranged from 88 percent at the East County facility to 69 percent at Family Court (Table 3.50).

Table 3.50
Court Personnel Explain Things by Facility
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>Court personnel take time to explain things to you.</i>										
	East County	South County	San Vista	San Marcos	Central Court	Hall of Justice	Family Court	Madge Bradley	Kearny Mesa	Juvenile Court
Agree	88%	82%	82%	79%	79%	82%	69%	79%	77%	81%
Neither	7%	7%	10%	10%	10%	10%	12%	8%	11%	11%
Disagree	6%	11%	8%	12%	11%	8%	19%	13%	11%	7%
Respondents	363	295	269	273	615	340	191	196	192	192
<i>Results significant at .05 percent.</i>										
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>										

Personnel Provide Adequate Information

Survey participants were asked whether or not they think the court provides adequate information about its procedures and services. Overall, 75 percent of court users agreed that the court does provide adequate information (Table 3.51).

Table 3.51
Personnel Provide Adequate Information
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

The court provides adequate information about its procedures and services.

	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>
Agree	75%	2,215
Neither	12%	355
Disagree	13%	392
Total	100%	2,962

SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments

Adequate Information by Case and Demographic Characteristics. Table 3.52 shows that 91 percent of respondents at court for probate matter, compared to 66 percent of juvenile matter respondents, agreed that the court provides adequate information about its procedures and services. Differences in demographics and case types were not significant.

Table 3.52
Personnel Provide Adequate Information by Type of Matter
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

The court provides adequate information about its procedures and services.

	<u>Civil</u>	<u>Probate</u>	<u>Family Law</u>	<u>Criminal</u>	<u>Juvenile</u>
Agree	74%	91%	71%	77%	66%
Neither	13%	3%	13%	11%	14%
Disagree	13%	5%	16%	12%	20%
Respondents	590	58	570	1,453	184

Results significant at .05 percent.

SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments

Adequate Information by Facility. The results were also compared across courts (Table 3.53). The proportion of respondents who agreed that the court provides adequate information ranged from 83 percent at the South County facility to 68 percent at Family Court and Juvenile Court. However, given that 66 percent of respondents at any court for a juvenile *matter* agreed that the Court provides adequate information (Table 3.52), it is not surprising that nearly the same proportion (68%) of respondents at Juvenile *Court* agreed.

Table 3.53
Personnel Provide Adequate Information by Facility
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>The court provides adequate information about its procedures and services.</i>										
	East County	South County	Vista	San Marcos	Central Court	Hall of Justice	Family Court	Madge Bradley	Kearny Mesa	Juvenile Court
Agree	80%	83%	76%	71%	72%	73%	68%	80%	74%	68%
Neither	9%	7%	12%	12%	14%	14%	18%	9%	11%	13%
Disagree	10%	10%	12%	17%	14%	12%	14%	11%	16%	19%
Respondents	369	298	266	275	634	347	191	192	198	192
<i>Results significant at .05 percent.</i>										
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>										

Adequate Staff

Respondents were asked if “the court has adequate staff to do its job.” Overall, 71 percent of respondents agreed with the statement (Table 3.54). This proportion is slightly lower than that for the other six questions related to court personnel. Sixteen percent (16%) of court users disagreed.

Table 3.54
Court Has Adequate Staff
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>The court has adequate staff to do its job.</i>		
	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>
Agree	71%	2,086
Neither	14%	399
Disagree	16%	466
Total	100%	2,951
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>		

Adequate Staff by Type of Matter. Table 3.55 shows the difference in level of agreement by type of matter. Respondents at court for juvenile matters were less likely than other respondents to agree that the court has adequate staff (ranging from 79% for probate matters to 60% for juvenile matters). However, because only 58 respondents were at court for probate matters (which could affect the findings), the data were re-examined excluding these respondents, with no change in the statistical significance of the results.

Table 3.55
Court Has Adequate Staff by Type of Matter
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>The court has adequate staff to do its job.</i>					
	<u>Civil</u>	<u>Probate</u>	<u>Family Law</u>	<u>Criminal</u>	<u>Juvenile</u>
Agree	70%	79%	67%	74%	60%
Neither	17%	9%	14%	11%	23%
Disagree	14%	12%	19%	16%	16%
Respondents	588	58	570	1,445	184
<i>Results significant at .05 percent.</i>					
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>					

Adequate Staff by Attorney Representation. Table 3.56 compares the difference in level of agreement between litigants represented by an attorney and those who were not (In Pro Per). Slightly more respondents represented by an attorney than In Pro Per agreed that the Court has adequate staff to do its job (75% and 72%, respectively). More noticeably, a five-point percentage difference is found among those who disagreed with the statement (17% In Pro Per, 12% with an attorney). These results are not unexpected given that litigants *with* an attorney are less likely to require assistance from court staff than those *without* an attorney.

Table 3.56
Court Has Adequate Staff by Attorney Representation
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>The court has adequate staff to do its job.</i>		
	<u>In ProPer</u>	<u>Attorney Represented</u>
Agree	72%	75%
Neither	11%	13%
Disagree	17%	12%
Respondents	1,596	416
<i>Results significant at .05 percent.</i>		
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>		

Adequate Staff by Number of Visits. As with the other questions presented regarding court personnel, there is an inverse relationship between the number of visits to court and level of agreement about the services provided, in this case, whether the court has adequate staff to do its job (Table 3.57). While 77 percent of first-time users agree, the proportion drops to 64 percent for those who have been to the court six times or more.

Table 3.57
Court Has Adequate Staff by Number of Visits
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>The court has adequate staff to do its job.</i>			
	First-time Visitor	Two to Five Visits	Six or More Visits
Agree	77%	70%	64%
Neither	12%	14%	15%
Disagree	11%	16%	21%
Respondents	945	1,323	683
<i>Results significant at .05 percent.</i>			
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>			

Adequate Staff by Ethnicity. There are differences in court users' opinions by ethnicity. More Hispanic and Asian respondents (77% and 73%, respectively) agreed the court has adequate staff than African American and White respondents (68% and 66%, respectively) (Table 3.58). The opinion of Hispanic and Asian respondents may be influenced by those who had the assistance of an interpreter while they were at court compared to African American and White respondents, who did not use an interpreter (other than 3 respondents interviewed by an interpreter who identified themselves as "White").

Table 3.58
Court Has Adequate Staff by Ethnicity
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>The court has adequate staff to do its job.</i>					
	African American	Asian	Hispanic	White	Other
Agree	68%	73%	77%	66%	51%
Neither	15%	17%	12%	14%	15%
Disagree	16%	10%	11%	19%	35%
Respondents	359	196	1,149	1,127	75
<i>Results significant at .05 percent.</i>					
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>					

Adequate Staff by Language. Based on the findings of respondents' opinions by ethnicity, it is not unexpected that comparing the data by language produced similar results (Table 3.59). A greater proportion of respondents interviewed in another language (76%) agreed the court has adequate staff compared to those interviewed in English (69%). Twice the percentage of those interviewed in English (18%) compared to those interviewed by an interpreter (9%) disagreed with the statement and think the court does not have adequate staff to do its job. Again, those interviewed in another language had the assistance of a court interpreter, which might have influenced their opinion.

Table 3.59
Court Has Adequate Staff by Language
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>The court has adequate staff to do its job.</i>		
	<u>English</u>	<u>Other than English</u>
Agree	69%	76%
Neither	13%	14%
Disagree	18%	9%
Respondents	2,315	636
<i>Results significant at .05 percent.</i>		
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>		

Personnel Who Stood Out in Providing Service

The Special Projects Unit used the occasion of this survey to give respondents an opportunity to inform the Court of any specific personnel who “stood out” in providing service. The question was placed in the survey instrument just after respondents were asked for their opinion regarding the treatment they received by court personnel. This was done in an effort to help them recall their experiences with court personnel they encountered while at court. For the most part, survey participants who responded to the question referred to the *positive* treatment they received by someone who particularly stood out in providing service, although some respondents also referred to the *negative* treatment they received. Therefore, an inference that these findings represent the proportion of court personnel who provide exemplary service would be incorrect. The results below are presented for informational purposes only.

Over 1,000 respondents (1,112) answered the question, “Were there any court personnel who stood out in providing service?” (Table 3.60). About half of these respondents (49%) said ‘court clerks’ and 40 percent said ‘courtroom personnel’ (which includes the judge, bailiff, courtroom clerk, and respondents’ attorney).

Table 3.60
Personnel Who Stood Out
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>Were there any court personnel who stood out in providing service?</i>		
	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>
Court clerks	49%	545
Courtroom personnel ¹	40%	444
Sheriff deputy	5%	60
Information desk	3%	36
Other	2%	27
Total	100%	1,112
<i>1 Includes Judge, Attorney, Bailiff, Clerk</i>		
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>		

Discussion

It is evident from the results presented in this section that, overall, a large majority of court users are satisfied with their treatment by court personnel, believe the Court provides adequate services, and has a sufficient number of staff. However, the results also show that a few respondent characteristics consistently may have been associated with their opinions. First-time visitors and respondents interviewed by an interpreter indicated a higher level of satisfaction with court personnel and its services than their counterparts. Additionally, those who call the court prior to their arrival rate the staff and the court's services *less* favorably than those who do not call ahead of time. An in-depth discussion of these findings is presented in this section of the report.

Number of Visits

The data presented have shown that there is an inverse relationship in satisfaction with the court's personnel and the number of visits to the court. That is, as the number of visits to the facility *increases*, the level of satisfaction *decreases*. This finding was unexpected because it was thought that first-time visitors would be less likely to agree with statements that court personnel are friendly and courteous, available, knowledgeable, and take time to explain things due to the visitors' unfamiliarity with the court and its procedures. However, the findings suggest that this was an incorrect assumption. Therefore, a comparison of the demographic and case characteristics of those who were first-time visitors and those who had been to the court before was conducted to explain this result. Age, gender, ethnicity, type of matter, stakeholder category, language, attorney representation, and actions taken prior to coming to court as well as after arriving at court were all evaluated.

However, this comparison of the two groups of respondents did not fully explain why court users who are at court for the first time are more satisfied with the services they receive than those who return to court on more than one occasion. No one particular characteristic stood out in contrast to the others. For example, fewer first-time visitors (73%) were interviewed in English compared to repeat visitors (80%) (not shown). Similarly, fewer first-time visitors (17%) were represented by attorney compared to repeat visitors (22%) (not shown). However, these variances do not provide sufficient information from which to form a conclusion as to why first-time visitors are seemingly more pleased with the staff and services provided by the court.

Therefore, consideration should also be given as to what court users might do during their first visit compared to their subsequent visits (if any). The first time someone comes to court, his/her case is most likely in its initial stages. The initial stages of a case may include the entering of a plea, setting up the case calendar, or simply filing preliminary documents (order to show cause, requesting a hearing, etc.). On the contrary, those who return to court multiple times have likely reached a more complicated phase in their case (trial, hearings, or mediation). These later stages of a case can be more strenuous, which may also explain why a greater proportion of return visitors were represented by an attorney. This distinction of what court users do during their first visit compared to subsequent visits quite possibly affects their opinion of court personnel, and their satisfaction with the court's services, to a greater degree than their demographic characteristics.

Language

Another trend which became apparent in the analysis is that, consistently, a greater proportion of respondents interviewed by an interpreter than those interviewed in English agreed court personnel were courteous, friendly, available, knowledgeable, provided prompt service, and that the court provided adequate services and had sufficient staff. An evaluation was conducted to compare these two groups (those interviewed in English and those who utilized an interpreter).

It was expected that persons requesting the services of an interpreter would have different demographic characteristics than those interviewed in English. This assumption was proven correct in that 93 percent of interpreter-assisted interviews were conducted with persons of Hispanic ethnicity (not shown). Three respondents interviewed by an interpreter were White; none were African American.

An examination of the differences in respondent selection was also considered. Interviews with persons requesting the assistance of a court interpreter were not available at each court. (No interpreter interviews were conducted at Kearny Mesa, Hall of Justice, Madge Bradley, Family Court, and Juvenile Court). Also, interpreters were instructed to ask those who requested their services to participate in the survey after they finished their business at the court, which is a similar manner in which respondents were interviewed in English except for the following:

- Respondents who needed the services of an interpreter received individualized service from the Court (the interpreter).
- The non-English speaking respondent might be more likely than other respondents to think the person who conducted the interview with them was a employee of the court (although interpreters are provided by the court, most are independent contractors). The English-speaking interviewers in the North County region were current court employees, but that was not likely known to the respondent who encountered them as they exited the building. In all other regions of the county, the English-speaking interviewers were either students or retired court employees. It is possible, but no data exist to confirm this, that the opinion of respondents might have been altered or affected if they thought they were being interviewed by a court employee.

Given the differences that existed among the two groups, and the potential that the interpreter-assisted respondents might skew the overall findings, their responses to all survey questions were first examined separately and then combined with those interviewed in English. Although a few percentage point differences were noted, the significance level did not change due to the high level of consensus among all survey participants. Therefore, the data for respondents interviewed by an interpreter were included, and the relatively slight differences were noted throughout the report.

After examining all the data, differences in opinion might be related to the fact that these participants requested and received very distinct services from the court compared to the respondents interviewed in English. More importantly, the interpreter provided individual assistance to these respondents. This provision by the court might have been associated with their level of appreciation and could explain why, in most instances, their responses were more positive than other respondents. To test this preliminary rationale, the Court would need to interview court users who need an interpreter, but for whom one is unable to be provided. However, the Court is required by statute to furnish interpreters to those who request one.

Calling the Court

A difference between respondents was also found among those who call the court prior to their arrival compared to those who do not call. For **each** statement presented regarding court personnel and the adequacy of court services, those who did *not* call the court were more positive than those who *did* call (Table 3.61).

Respondents who called the court and indicated it was not helpful provide some insight to these findings. Previously in this report, the helpfulness of calling the court was discussed. Twenty-eight percent (28%) of those who called said it was not helpful (Table 3.16, page 47). When questioned as to why it was not helpful, the majority of respondents said they could not get an answer or they were frustrated using the answering system, most of which is provided through pre-recorded information (page 42). This suggests that the less positive opinion might be related to frustration with using the phone service and not with staff they encountered while *at* the courthouse.

Table 3.61
Opinions of Court Personnel by Calling the Court
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>Percentage of respondents who agree that ...</i>		
<i>Court personnel</i>	<u>Called the Court</u>	<u>Did Not Call</u>
are friendly and courteous	87%	89%
questions	80%	85%
provide prompt counter service	77%	78%
questions	75%	82%
take time to explain things to you	77%	81%
<i>The Court</i>		
provides adequate information	71%	76%
has adequate staff	66%	72%
Respondents	587- 601	2,333 - 2,411
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>		

Court Facilities

As previously noted, some differences in satisfaction with the court were observed in respondent opinions when the data were examined across court facilities. Consistently, with the exception of the question of prompt service, a smaller proportion of respondents at Family Court agreed with the statements presented. To understand these differences, a brief discussion comparing respondent characteristics by court facility follows. A detailed presentation of respondent demographics at each court was presented in Chapter Two.

Given that some courts have jurisdiction over specific matters, the most significant difference in survey participants at each court is the type of matter they came to court to resolve, which often also explains differences in demographics. For example, because Family Court only hears matters pertaining to dissolution of marriage (including separation and nullity) and child custody (including paternity and child support), it is understandable that 95 percent of these respondents were under 55 years of age (Table 2.2). Differences in ethnicity generally mirrored the population served by each court (Table 2.3). As for case type differences, the proportion of first-time visitors at Family Court (33%) was comparable to other courts (ranging from 44% to 28%) (not shown).

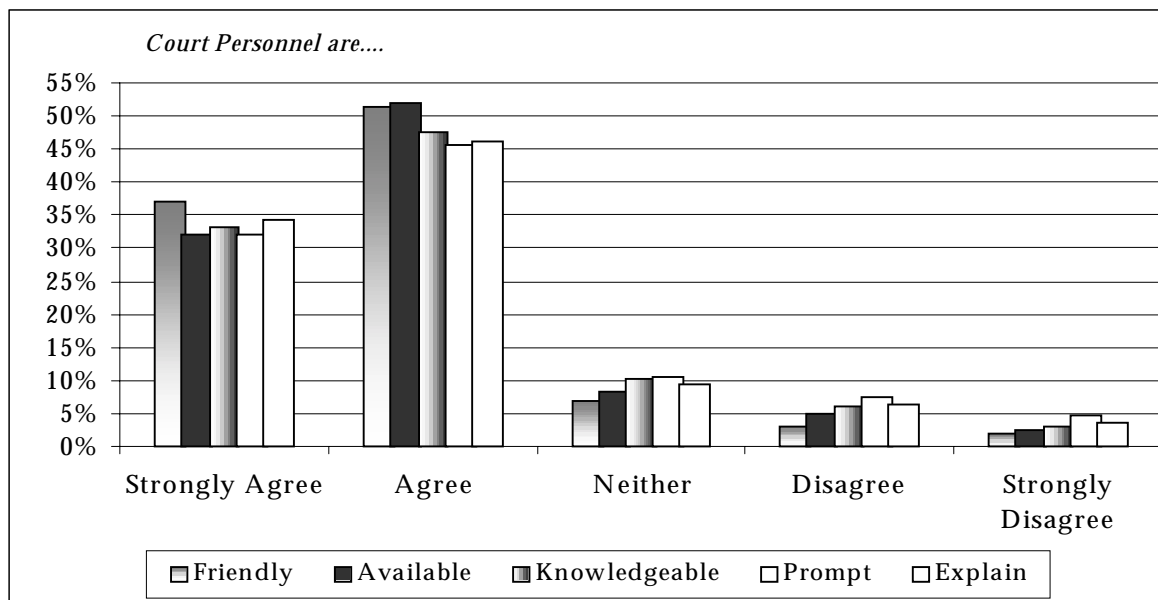
Eighty percent (80%) of litigants were not represented by an attorney at Family Court. The proportion of litigants *without* legal representation varied widely across courts and is most likely reflective of the type and seriousness of the matter (ranging from 98% at the Kearny Mesa and San Marcos facilities to 56% at Central and Juvenile Court)(not shown). Although Family Court matters are unquestionably considered serious, the Court recognizes that many people cannot afford legal representation for these matters. To meet the needs of this population of court users, a variety of free or low cost legal services are available inside the Family Court building. Free legal advice is provided daily on a walk-in basis and there is also free or low cost family court counseling and mediation. All child custody disputes are required to be heard first by a family court mediator/counselor, which facilitates the settlement of child custody disputes. These services are also available in other court facilities that hear family law matters. However, court staff (and anyone else not licensed to practice law in California) are *prohibited* from providing legal advice, which includes making suggestions or corrections related to the filing or filling out of forms. Given that 80 percent of Family Court litigants were not represented by an attorney, it is expected that this group may be more likely to request help from court staff.

Therefore, the finding that a *smaller* proportion of Family Court respondents were satisfied with the services of court personnel cannot conclusively be attributed to their demographic profile, nor to their lack of legal representation. Their opinion may be influenced by either the sensitivity of the issues heard at this facility or their perception that court staff *choose* not to provide assistance when, in fact, they are legally precluded from doing so. Future interviews conducted with court users either by mail or by telephone sometime after appearing at court would provide more data from which to analyze this assumption.

Summary of Staff Courtesy and Court Services

The results and discussion presented in this section show that an overwhelming majority of court users are satisfied with treatment by staff and the services they receive while at court. To further illustrate this point, the original responses are presented in Figure 3.1. As evidenced by the data, at least 30 percent of survey participants *strongly* agree and an additional 45 percent agree, that court personnel are friendly and courteous, available to answer questions, know the answers to questions, provide prompt service, and take time to explain things. Very few (5% or less) strongly disagree, and less than ten percent disagree with any of the statements. Clearly, court users are satisfied with the treatment they receive from staff.

Figure 3.1
Respondent Perceptions of Staff Courtesy
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey 2000



SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments

Furthermore, additional analyses of the results showed that certain factors were associated with respondents' opinions. A greater proportion of first-time court users agreed with most of the statements compared to those who had been to the court previously. Similarly, respondents interviewed by a court interpreter were proportionately more satisfied than those interviewed in English. However, respondents who called the court prior to their visit were less likely to agree that court personnel are available, knowledgeable, and take time to explain things. The data also showed that court users respond a bit differently at each facility, which may partially be explained by the type of case they came to court to resolve. In spite of the differences across courts, types of cases, respondent characteristics, and the emotions often surrounding court appearances, a vast majority of court users are satisfied with the court's staff and services received.

NON-ENGLISH SPEAKING RESPONDENTS

The primary goal of this project was to determine court users' accessibility to facilities and services. In developing the scope of this project, the Court was sensitive to the fact that some of its court users did not speak English. To ensure that the opinions and suggestions of this population were included, 671 interviews were conducted with persons who requested a court interpreter. Throughout the report, differences in the opinions of English and non-English speaking respondents were discussed. However, non-English speaking participants were also asked a few supplementary questions regarding any difficulties they might have experienced because of their need for an interpreter. This section of the report discusses the results of those questions.

Problems Due to Need for Interpreter

Survey participants were asked (1) if they experienced any difficulties because of their need for an interpreter, and (2) if so, what problems did they encounter. Only 18 percent (117 of 671 respondents) stated that they did experience some problems because they needed to have an interpreter (not shown). Table 3.62 shows the common explanations of problems encountered by non-English speaking respondents. The statement most often given by participants was that the interpreter was "busy with lots of other cases" (60%). Some reported that the translation was an issue (14%), the need for an interpreter slowed down the court process (12%), and some provided various other explanations (14%). Many of the other comments offered by respondents focused on issues related to the fact they do not speak English, not their need for an interpreter. This might have been due to an incorrect translation of the question: "because of your need for an interpreter," could have been translated or understood to mean "because you do not speak English."

Table 3.62
Interpreter Problems
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>What problems did you experience because of your need for an interpreter?</i>		
	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>
Interpreter busy	60%	60
Translation	14%	14
Delayed process	12%	12
Other	14%	14
Total	100%	100
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>		

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Survey respondents were given several opportunities to make suggestions for improvement of court services. Respondents were given a list of four specific items and asked if they would have been beneficial had they been available. Respondents were also asked if anything would have made their visit easier and, if so, would they describe what would have helped. This section of the report discusses the results of respondents' suggestions.

Overall, 33 percent of survey participants (1,017 respondents) indicated affirmatively that 'something' would have made their visit easier. Similar comments were coded for analysis and are presented in Table 3.63. The percentages shown are based on the total number of respondents who answered affirmatively. The suggestion most often repeated was to provide "faster service" (22%), which includes the respondents who stated "the wait is too long," or "need more staff." These responses were combined because they are both related to the same point. A similar proportion (20%) suggested that the Court provide "more information," which includes any responses addressing 'need more information,' such as the cost of fines, directions to the court, or court processes. A small proportion recommended improving the signage both inside and outside the facilities (4%), a letter from the court to remind them of their appearance date (3%), or assistance with filling out paperwork (3%). The Court was provided a comprehensive record of all comments and suggestions, examples of which follow the table below.

Table 3.63
Suggestions for Improvement
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>What would have made your visit easier?</i>		
	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>
Faster service	22%	223
More information	20%	205
Better signs	4%	45
A letter from the court	3%	32
Assistance with paperwork	3%	29
Respondents		1,017
<i>Percentages based on multiple responses.</i>		
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>		

Other Suggestions and Comments

The following represent the wide variety of comments and suggestions offered by respondents in response to the question “What would have made your visit easier?”

Interviewed in English

- “More computer access to public records.”
- “Provide ability to pay for traffic ticket over the Internet or on the phone.”
- “A city map or map of location of court, on the back of the ticket.”
- “A children’s play center or child-care.”
- “Someplace to eat at Juvenile Court.”
- “Less expensive copying rates.”
- “Change the numbering of court offices to reflect the floor they are on. For example, office/room ‘32’ would be on the third floor.”
- “Have forms available on the Internet.”
- “Get someone to answer the telephones.”
- “Make court postponement available by telephone.”
- “Not to have to come to Vista to get papers for San Marcos.”
- “More volunteer attorneys to help in civil court.”
- “If I could have gotten a map mailed to me (I live in Los Angeles), and if they would have told me how much I was going to pay.”
- “I want to talk to a real person on the phones.”
- “To be able to make appointments with the facilitator who takes people out of order.”
- “If I would have known about the five-year limit on divorce proceedings.”
- “A ‘guide’ would be helpful.”
- “If the directory did not blend into the wall – the ATM is more visible.”
- “More respect for ‘In Pro Per.’”
- “If I knew where to go before coming to court.” (Note: respondent went to Family Court, but should have gone to El Cajon).

Interviewed in another language

- “People who speak Spanish at the information desk, clerks, and employees.”
- “If they had more interpreters – ‘outside’ interpreters – outside interpreters do not interpret everything like the court interpreters do, ‘regular’ bilingual people only tell you what they want you to know.”
- “Information on the Internet in other languages.”
- “Better information from the person who checked me in, she mistakenly sent me to Vista when it was at San Marcos.”
- “To be able to send my payment from Mexico.”
- “Someone to translate the forms, the interpreter filled out the form for me.”
- “Have the signs in Spanish.”

Beneficial Items

Survey participants were also given a list of four items and asked to state with a yes or no response if it would be beneficial to them for their visit to court. The list included (1) a map of the facility posted at the entrances, (2) court docket (list of cases) posted at entrance, (3) pamphlet explaining what to expect at court, and (4) court cases or docket information available via the Internet. The majority of respondents (over 65%) did indicate that three of the items would benefit them (Table 3.64). Just over half (53%) thought information on the Internet would be beneficial.

Table 3.64
Beneficial Items
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>Would any of the following be of benefit to you? (Affirmative responses)</i>		
	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>
Pamphlet explaining what to expect at court	71%	2,170
Map of facility posted at entrance	68%	2,064
Court docket posted at entrance	65%	1,993
Court cases, or docket, via the Internet	53%	1,615
Respondents		3,045
<i>Percentages are based on multiple response.</i>		
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>		

Beneficial by Facility. The responses were also compared across courts (Table 3.65), which shows that a greater proportion of Family Court respondents (84%) agreed that a pamphlet explaining court procedures would be beneficial. Similarly, Madge Bradley respondents were more likely to agree that a docket posted at the entrance would be helpful (79%).

Table 3.65
Beneficial Items by Facility
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>Would any of the following be of benefit to you? (Affirmative responses)</i>										
	East County	South County	Vista	San Marcos	Central Court	Hall of Justice	Family Court	Madge Bradley	Kearny Mesa	Juvenile Court
• Pamphlet	66%	72%	71%	76%	74%	58%	84%	73%	67%	80%
• Map	74%	70%	72%	65%	73%	63%	65%	65%	53%	62%
• Docket	60%	68%	68%	63%	75%	57%	64%	79%	58%	52%
• Internet	41%	51%	54%	54%	44%	76%	54%	62%	61%	46%
Respondents	379	303	276	282	655	351	202	200	203	194
<i>Results significant at .05 percent.</i>										
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>										

Beneficial by Language. The list of items were also compared by respondents who were interviewed in English to those interviewed in another language. Table 3.66 shows a greater proportion of non-English speaking survey participants would find all of the items beneficial to them, except for court cases and docket information via the Internet. In that case, twice as many English-speaking respondents compared to those interviewed in another language said that they would find information via the Internet helpful.

Table 3.66
Beneficial Items by Language
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>Would any of the following be of benefit to you? (Affirmative responses)</i>		
	<u>English</u>	Other than <u>English</u>
Pamphlet explaining what to expect at court	69%	78%
Map of facility posted at entrance	64%	81%
Court docket posted at entrance	63%	75%
Court cases, or docket, via the Internet	60%	30%
Respondents	2,374	671
<i>Results significant at .05 percent.</i>		
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>		

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPATION

The last question asked of survey participants was whether or not they would like to participate in a focus group “to assist the Court in responding to the needs of the community.” Interviewers informed the respondents that the formation of the focus group was only a *possibility*, and that if it did occur, it would be sometime in the future. Respondents who were willing to participate were asked to provide their name, address, and telephone number to the interviewer. Several steps were taken to reassure respondents who agreed to provide this information that it would be kept separate from the survey. First, the form was the last page on the survey. Second, if a respondent agreed to provide this information, the form was separated from the survey in the presence of the respondent. Third, respondents were asked to fill in the information themselves. Fourth, the form was placed in a ‘confidential’ envelope, also in the presence of the respondent, and forwarded to the Court’s Special Projects Unit.

Prior to the survey, the Court was hoping to obtain enough respondents from each court to form one or two focus groups per facility although it was thought that few people would be willing to take the time to be part of a focus group. However, this proved to be incorrect. Surprisingly, 33 percent of survey participants (1,006 respondents) said they would be willing to participate in a focus group (not shown). Additionally, those who agreed spanned all demographic groups, including respondents interviewed by an interpreter. Seventeen percent (17%) of the respondents who agreed to participate in a focus group were interviewed by an interpreter.

When those who agreed to participate were compared across courts, the most significant difference was found between Family Court where 42 percent agreed to participate, and at Central Court (26% agreed) (Table 3.67). This finding, that a greater proportion of Family Court users were willing to participate in the focus group, is partially explained by results presented earlier that these respondents were less satisfied with the staff and services than respondents at other courts.

Table 3.67
Focus Group Participation by Facility
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>Would you like to participate in a focus group?</i>										
	East County	South County	Vista	San Marcos	Central Court	Hall of Justice	Family Court	Madge Bradley	Kearny Mesa	Juvenile Court
Yes	39%	39%	33%	30%	26%	29%	42%	32%	38%	34%
No	61%	61%	67%	70%	74%	71%	58%	69%	62%	66%
Respondents	379	303	276	282	655	351	202	200	203	194
<i>Results significant at .05 percent.</i>										
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>										

CONCLUSION

There is sufficient evidence from the results of this survey to conclude that the San Diego Superior Court meets the needs of a diverse population, across racial and ethnic groups, age, gender, educational levels, and language, including those who need the assistance of a court interpreter. Satisfaction with the Court's services, buildings, and staff are also consistent when comparing case types, stakeholder groups, and by the number of times a someone visited the court. Furthermore, the results also show that an overwhelming majority of court users are pleased with the services they receive, the attitudes of court personnel, and the facilities provided at **all ten facilities**.

This conclusion is made more significant when the full scope of the project is considered. More than 30 interviewers conducted in-person surveys with more than 3,000 respondents over a sixteen-week period at ten different court facilities located throughout the San Diego County region. Interviews were conducted in the morning and afternoon and on every day of the workweek, in English, Spanish, Tagalog, Cambodian, Laotian, American Sign Language and a few various other languages. Given the extent of this effort, and that the findings among all groups of respondents are quite favorable to the Court, clearly, the results can be ascribed to the general court user population (with the exception of jurors and criminal justice-related employees who were not surveyed). Therefore, the Court can confidently report that the majority of people who come to court can access the facilities with ease and are satisfied with the services and staff they encounter.

Recommendations for improvements, which are included in the Executive Summary, are provided as a means to continue this high level of satisfaction by court users.

Possible Explanations for High Public Satisfaction

As part of the evaluation, SANDAG staff met with Court personnel to pursue possible reasons for the high level of satisfaction, as evidenced by the survey results. The following information was provided by Court personnel.

The high level of public satisfaction with access to the San Diego Superior Court is probably attributable to the fact that enhanced public service and public access are primary concerns of the Court, which is reflected in operational improvements and a customer service culture. In December of 1998, the four Municipal Courts and Superior Court of San Diego unified into a single Superior Court. Court unification provided the opportunity to standardize the commitment to public service on a countywide basis.

Commitment to the public is a key issue in the planning process. All Superior Courts in California participate in a statewide effort to develop and submit a long-range strategic plan to the State Judicial Council, which is the policy making body for the California Courts. The Strategic Plan delineates issues and goals from FY 1999/00 to FY 2003/04. From there, operational objectives are set that support the larger goals.

Two of the six issues in the San Diego Superior Court's Strategic Plan and corresponding goals pertain to public service as follows:

Issues	Goals
Enhance public service and public access.	Provide equal access to the Court for all people. Enhance public service in the Court.
Quality of justice and public confidence in the court.	Promote the quality of justice by focusing on service and improving the public's understanding of court operations.

The focus on service to the public is not only a policy issue of importance to the judges and executives of the court, but is also communicated throughout all levels of the organization, both formally and informally. Some of the internal methods for focusing on the service to the public include:

- Preparation of Quarterly Reports by the Assistant Executives that include results of customer comment cards, which allow the public to provide feedback to the Court in 5 areas of performance.
- An Employee Recognition Awards Program in which employees who demonstrate superior customer service are acknowledged by noting their performance in the Employee Newsletter.

In addition to the internal efforts to promote a customer service orientation, a number of operational changes have been made that directly benefit the public. These include:

- Within the Central Division of the Court, all levels of civil and criminal cases that were previously handled independently are now combined, so that the public can participate in a one stop shop.
- The calendaring of cases has been improved to increase public convenience.
- Signage has been improved throughout the major facilities of the Court.
- Arraignments are now allowed at the counter in some instances (such as traffic) instead of requiring a court appearance.

- The Court's Web site has been enhanced to provide more information over the Internet.
- The Court has eliminated a 900 number system previously used in the San Diego Municipal Court's Traffic Division, whereby the public could get case specific information over the phone for a fee. This has been replaced by a courtwide policy whereby all public phone numbers can result in contact with a human rather than only a phone tree.

Finally, the fact that the Court embarked on an effort of this magnitude (the Court Users Survey) in order to measure how the public perceives access to the courts demonstrates the commitment that the Court has to serving the public.

The Court's stated plan at this point is to carefully review the results of the survey so that some of the suggestions made for improving service can be evaluated and implemented where feasible.

APPENDIX A

ADDITIONAL TABLES

Table A-1
Average Daily Volume of Court Users and Proposed Survey Allocation
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

Facility	ADV		Proposed Surveys by Language					
			English		Spanish		Other	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Central Court	5,473	25%	440	18%	265	42%	84	42%
Hall of Justice	4,328	20%	430	17%	0	0%	0	0%
East County	2,855	13%	230	9%	137	22%	44	22%
Vista	2,580	12%	200	8%	124	20%	40	20%
Kearny Mesa	1,915	9%	200	8%	0	0%	0	0%
South County	1,805	8%	200	8%	99	16%	32	16%
Juvenile Court	985	5%	200	8%	0	0%	0	0%
Family Court	956	4%	200	8%	0	0%	0	0%
Vista Annex	632	3%	200	8%	0	0%	0	0%
Madge Bradley	219	1%	200	8%	0	0%	0	0%
Total	21,748	100%	2,500	100%	625	100%	200	100%

SOURCE: San Diego Superior Court

Table A-2
Received Letter by Facility
San Diego Superior Court Users Survey, 2000

<i>Did you receive a letter from the court?</i>										
	East County	South County	Vista	San Marcos	Central Court	Hall of Justice	Family Court	Madge Bradley	Kearny Mesa	Juvenile Court
Yes	43%	41%	32%	62%	36%	17%	27%	35%	65%	53%
No	57%	59%	68%	38%	64%	83%	74%	65%	35%	47%
Respondents	379	303	275	281	654	351	200	199	202	194
<i>Results significant at .05 percent.</i>										
<i>SOURCE: San Diego Association of Governments</i>										

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APPENDIX C

SURVEY WITH RESPONSES

San Diego County Court Survey

FACILITY: _____ DATE: _____ LANGUAGE: _____
INTERVIEWER: _____ START TIME: _____
FINISH TIME: _____ OFFICE USE ONLY. I.D.#

*All questions, responses and statements in boxes are to be read exactly as they appear. All instructions are italicized and are **not** to be read aloud. Unless otherwise stated, circle only one response for each question.*

HI. I'M HERE ON BEHALF OF THE COURT ADMINISTRATION. THEY ARE CONDUCTING A SURVEY OF PEOPLE WHO USE THE FACILITIES TO GET THEIR OPINION CONCERNING STAFF AND SERVICES PROVIDED. ARE YOU FINISHED WITH YOUR BUSINESS AT THE COURT TODAY?

1. What type of matter brought you to the courthouse today?

20% Civil / Small Claims
2% Probate
19% Family Law (Child Support)
49% Criminal / Traffic
6% Juvenile
3% Other (specify): Includes research, "just for fun," visit friends," job interview," and "watch trials."
n = 3,028

2. What brought you to the court, today?

If juror or criminal justice agency personnel (read following statement)
"Ok, thanks for your time. However, we are not interviewing people involved with the court today. The opinions of jurors and criminal justice agency personnel will be assessed at another time."

3% Witness or Victim
20% Plaintiff → If Plaintiff (n=595)... Were you represented by an attorney? Yes 14%
50% Defendant → If Defendant(n=1,473)... Were you represented by an attorney? Yes 23%
19% Friend / Family
<1% Media
<1% Community Organization
4% Attorney Service / Messenger
4% Other: (specify) Includes investigator, employee, social worker, paralegal, and "for myself."
n = 3,023

3. Were you in a courtroom today?

45% Yes (ask 3b)
55% No (skip to 4)
n = 3,033

3b. Were the proceedings easy to follow and understand?

87% Yes
13% No
n = 1,327

4. Did you conduct any court business outside of a courtroom?

56% Yes
44% No
n = 3,045

5. Is this the first time you've been to this facility?

33% Yes (Skip to 6)

67% No (Ask 5b and 5c)

n = 3,045

5b. How many times have you been here before today? None (33%), 2 to 5 times (45%), six more (23%).

n = 3,045

5c. Approximately how long has it been since your last visit here? One month or less (53%), two to six months (21%), seven to 12 months (9%), 13 months or more (17%).

n = 2,050

"I'M GOING TO READ A SERIES OF STATEMENTS. AFTER EACH STATEMENT, PLEASE TELL ME YOUR LEVEL OF AGREEMENT OR DISAGREEMENT FROM, STRONGLY AGREE, AGREE, NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE, DISAGREE, OR STRONGLY DISAGREE."

	Court Personnel . . . (n = ranged from 3,015 to 3,037)	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	N/A
6.	Are friendly and courteous.	37%	51%	7%	3%	2%	<1%
7.	Are available to answer your questions.	31%	51%	8%	5%	3%	2%
8.	Provide prompt service at the counters.	31%	44%	10%	7%	4%	3%
9.	Know the answers to your questions.	32%	46%	10%	6%	3%	3%
10.	Take time to explain things to you.	33%	44%	9%	6%	4%	3%

11. Were there any Court personnel that stood out in providing service?

37% Yes (ask 11b).

63% No (skip to 12).

n = 3,034

11b. Can you recall who it was? Court Clerks (49%), courtroom personnel (40%), Sheriff (5%), information desk (3%), various other (2%) (other includes "Legal Advisor," "Notary," "Interpreter").

n = 1,112

12. Did you receive a written communication, (a letter), from the court?

40% Yes (ask 12b and 12c)

60% No (skip to 13, next page)

n = 3,038

12b. Did the letter you receive provide all, some or none of what you needed to know to come to court?

68% All (skip to 13, next page)

26% Some (ask 12c)

6% None (ask 12c)

n = 1,200

12c. How could the letter have been more helpful to you? If it had more information (n=218), easier to understand (n=56), in my language (n=31), if it was correct (n=20), various other (n=39).

13. Prior to coming here today, did you do any of the following to get information?

NOTE: Percentages are based on the proportion of survey participants that responded affirmatively (they <i>did</i> do one of the following) (N=3,045)	Choose all that apply	13b. How Helpful was this method in providing information? (<i>raw numbers</i>)					If not helpful, why not?
		Very Helpful	Somewhat Helpful	Neither Helpful nor Not Helpful	Not Very Helpful →	Not Helpful at All →	
Call the court (<i>n</i> = 608)	20%	246	144	43	63	105	Write response in the space to the left <i>n</i> = 131 ←
Visit the court’s Web site (<i>n</i> = 131)	4%	37	39	17	18	17	
Write to the court or the Business office (<i>n</i> =85)	3%	22	19	10	19	14	
Other: example: “Called a lawyer” (<i>n</i> = 97)	3%	43	16	4	2	3	
Did nothing prior (<i>n</i> = 2,251)	74%	No answer (<i>n</i> =44, couldn’t access(<i>n</i> =34), insufficient information (<i>n</i> =22), various other (<i>n</i> =31)					

14. How easy was it to find the right building?

76% Very Easy

15% Somewhat Easy

3% Neither Easy or Hard

4% Not Very Easy → Why not? Confusing (*n*=77), street signs not clear, visible(*n*=29),

1% Not Easy at All → " building markings (*n*=20), various other (*n*=20).
n = 3,035

15. Once inside the building, did you do any of the following to locate the office or courtroom you needed?

NOTE: Percentages are based on the proportion of survey participants that responded affirmatively (they <i>did</i> do one of the following) (N=3,045)	Choose all that apply	15b. How helpful was this method in providing information? (<i>raw numbers</i>)					If not helpful, why not?
		Very Helpful	Somewhat Helpful	Neither Helpful nor Not Helpful	Not Very Helpful →	Not Helpful at All →	
Use Directory, Maps or Signs? (n = 779)	26%	472	191	37	37	14	Write response in the space to the left n = 74 ←
Ask someone inside or at the Information Desk? (n = 1,595)	52%	1,176	253	39	22	21	
Other: example “Asked my friend.” (n = 44)	1%	16	6	1	1	3	
Not clear (n=28), didn’t have the information needed (n=14), couldn’t find it (or them) (n=9), various other (n=23).							

16. How easy was it to find the right office or courtroom?

74% Very Easy

18% Somewhat Easy

3% Neither Easy or Hard

4% Not Very Easy → Why not? Confusing (n=65), signage problems (n=41), office

<1% Not Easy at All → “ markings (n=24), various other (n=10).

n = 3,036

“I’M GOING TO READ A SERIES OF STATEMENTS. AFTER EACH STATEMENT, PLEASE TELL ME YOUR LEVEL OF AGREEMENT OR DISAGREEMENT FROM, STRONGLY AGREE, AGREE, NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE, DISAGREE, OR STRONGLY DISAGREE.

	(n = ranged from 3,002 to 3,029)	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	N/A
17.	The court provides adequate information about its procedures and services.	24%	49%	12%	9%	4%	2%
18.	The court has adequate staff to do its job.	23%	47%	13%	10%	5%	2%
19.	You felt safe in this building today.	55%	40%	3%	2%	<1%	<1%

20. Was there any business you couldn’t do because you couldn’t afford it?

11% Yes (ask 20b)

89% No (skip to 21).

n = 3,028

20b. What couldn’t you do? Hire legal services (n=105), pay fine (n=77), file court action (n=58).

21. Have you experienced any problems entering, leaving, or using the offices or facilities of the court?

9% Yes (ask 21b)

91% No (skip to 22)

n = 3,015

21b. What problems did you experience? Difficulties due to a disability (n=14), metal detector too sensitive (n=46), lines are too long (n=24).

Interpreter-Assisted only. (671 respondents were interviewed by an interpreter)

22. Were there any problems you faced today because of your need for an interpreter?

18% Yes (ask 22b)

82% No (skip to next page)

n = 665

22b. What problems did you face? Interpreter too busy (n=60), translation problems (n=14), slowed down (or delayed) the process (n=12), various other (n=14).

"I AM GOING TO READ YOU A SERIES OF QUESTIONS, WHICH ARE COMPLETELY CONFIDENTIAL AND VERY IMPORTANT FOR INTERPRETING THE RESULTS OF THIS SURVEY. I WILL READ EACH QUESTION AND ALL OF THE POSSIBLE ANSWER CHOICES AND ASK THAT YOU CHOOSE WHICH CATEGORY BEST DEFINES HOW YOU WOULD DESCRIBE YOURSELF."

- 23. Gender:** Male 56% Female 44% n=3,004
- 24. What is your home zip code?** City of San Diego (44%), North County (17%), East County (12%), South County (12%), Other California areas (4%), Out of state (10%). n=2,995
- 25. What is your age?** 18 to 34 (44%), 35 to 54 (45%), 55 and older (11%). n=3,018
- 26. What is your ethnicity?** n=2,995
- 12% African – American
 - 7% Asian / Pacific Islander
 - 39% Caucasian
 - 40% Hispanic
 - 1% Native - American
 - 1% Other (*Specify*): Majority of 'other' responses indicated "Mixed race."
- 27. What is your educational attainment?** n=3,017
- 11% Less than 9th grade
 - 11% Some high school
 - 23% High school graduate or GED certificate
 - 7% Vocational college or trade school
 - 29% Some college
 - 20% Four year degree
- 28. Please state with a yes or no response if any of the following would be beneficial to you.**
- | | | | | | |
|---|-----|-----|----|-----|-----------|
| Map of the facility posted at entrance | Yes | 68% | No | 32% | n = 3,045 |
| Court docket posted at entrance (<i>schedule of hearings</i>) | Yes | 65% | No | 35% | “ |
| Pamphlet explaining what to expect at court | Yes | 71% | No | 29% | “ |
| Court cases or docket information via the Internet | Yes | 53% | No | 47% | “ |
- 29. Is there anything that would have made your visit here today easier?** n=3,045
- 33% Yes (*ask 29b*)
 - 67% No (*skip to 30*)
- 29b. What would have made your visit here today easier?** Faster service (n=223), more info (n=205) better signs (n=45), a (reminder) letter from the court (n=32), assistance with paperwork (n=29)
- 30. Based on the results of the survey, the court may decide to form focus groups in the future. If so, would you be willing to participate to assist the court in responding to the needs of the community?**
- 33% Yes n=3,045
 - 67% No

THANK THEM FOR THEIR PARTICIPATION and GIVE THEM A POST-IT PAD

SAN DIEGO COUNTY COURT FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPATION

By filling out the personal information below, you are indicating that you wish to be contacted to participate in a focus group the San Diego County Court Administration **may** decide to organize in the future.

Your personal information will remain confidential with the court and will not be provided to anyone outside the Court Administrative staff.

Please complete the following if you wish to be contacted to participate in a San Diego County Court Focus Group.

Name

Address

City, State and Zip

Phone Number

Thank you